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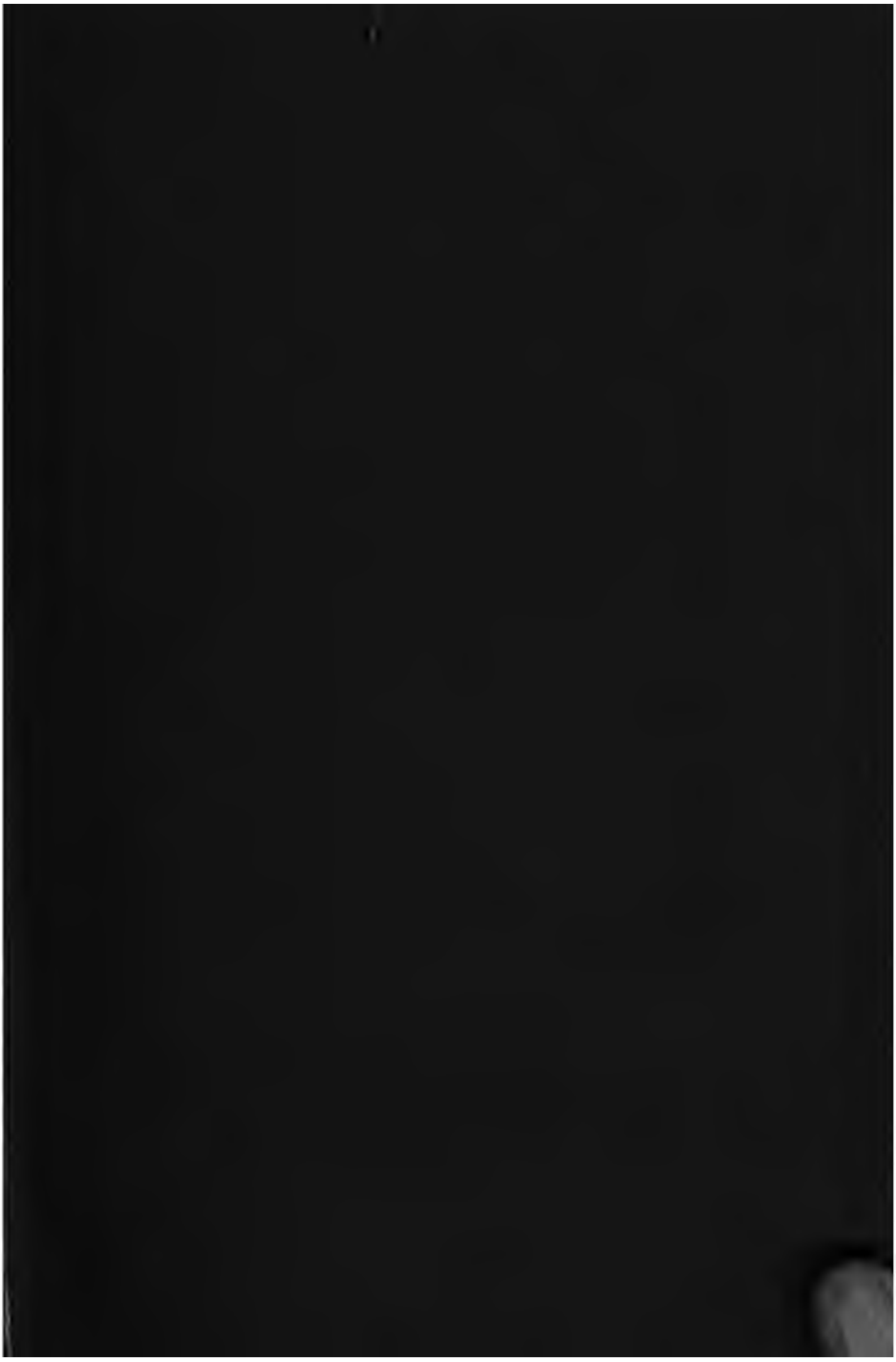

THE THREE BRIDES.

THE

THREE BRIDES.

BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE,

AUTHOR OF "THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE," &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOLUME I.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

THE MODEL AND HER COPIES 1

CHAPTER II.

THE POPULATION OF COMPTON POYNSETT 14

CHAPTER III.

PARISH EXPLORATIONS 33

CHAPTER IV.

SHADES IN SUNSHINE 54

CHAPTER V.

A SUNDAY OF EXCITEMENT 66

CHAPTER VI.

WEDDING VISITS 84

CHAPTER VII.

PAGE

UNFRUITFUL SUGGESTIONS 99

CHAPTER VIII.

UNSATISFACTORY 117

CHAPTER IX.

COLD HEART 133

CHAPTER X.

A TRUANT 144

CHAPTER XI.

ROSAMOND'S APOLOGUE 164

CHAPTER XII.

PASTORAL VISITING 179

CHAPTER XIII.

WITHERED LEAVES AND FRESH BUDS 200

CHAPTER XIV.

NEITHER LAND NOR WATER 219

CHAPTER XV.

PAGE
PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT 235

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DRIVE TO BACKSWORTH 252

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ENCHANTMENTS 280

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEMONSTRATIONS 299

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MONSTROUS REGIMENT OF WOMEN 317

CHAPTER XX.

VIVIENNE 339

THE THREE BRIDES.

CHAPTER I.

THE MODEL AND HER COPIES.

"There is sure another Flood toward, that so many couples are coming to the Ark."—*As You Like It.*

"AH! it is a pitiable case!"

"What case, boys?"

"Yours, Mother, with such an influx of daughters-in-law."

"I suspect the daughters-in-law think themselves more to be pitied."

"As too many suns in one sphere."

"As daughters-in-law at all."

"There's a ready cure for that. Eh, Charlie?"

"The sight of the mother-in-law."

"Safe up on the shelf? Ha, you flattering boys!"

"Well, each of the three bridegrooms has severally told us that his bride was a strong likeness of the mother, so she will have the advantage of three mirrors!"

"Ay, and each married solely for her benefit. I wonder which is the truest!"

"Come, Baby Charles, don't *you* take to being cynical and satirical," said the mother. "It would be more to the purpose to consider of the bringing them home. Let me see, Raymond and his Cecil will be at Holford's Gate at 5.30. They must have the carriage in full state. I suppose Brewer knows."

"Trust the ringers for scenting it out."

"Julius and Rosamond by the down train at Willansborough, at 4.50. One of you must drive old Snapdragon in the van for them. They will not mind when they understand; but there's that poor wife of Miles's, I wish she could have come a few days earlier. Her friend, Mrs. Johnson, is to drop her by the express at Backsworth, at 3.30."

"Inconvenient woman!"

"I imagine that she cannot help it; Mrs. Johnson is going far north, and was very good in staying with her at Southampton till she could move. Poor little thing! alone in a strange country! I'll tell you what! One of you must run down by train, meet her, and either bring her home in a fly, or wait to be picked up by Raymond's train. Take her Miles's letter."

The two young men glanced at one another in dismay, and the elder said, "Wouldn't Nurse do better?"

"No, no, Frank," said the younger, catching a distressed look on their mother's face, "I'll look up

Miles's little African. I've rather a curiosity that way. Only don't let them start the bells under the impression that we are a pair of the victims. If so, I shall bolt."

"Julius must be the nearest bolting," said Frank. "How he accomplished it passes my comprehension. I shall not believe in it till I see him. There, then, I'll give orders. Barouche for the squire, van for the rector, and the rattling fly for the sailor's wife. So wags the course of human life," chanted Frank Charnock, as he strolled out of the room.

"Thanks, Charlie," whispered his mother. "I am grieved for that poor young thing. I wish I could go myself. And, Charlie, would you cast an eye round, and see how things look in their rooms? You have always been my daughter."

"Ah! my vocation is gone! Three in one day! I wonder which is the best of the lot. I bet upon Miles's Cape Gooseberry.—Tired, Mother darling? Shall I send in Nurse? I must be off, if I am to catch the 12.30 train."

He bent to kiss the face, which was too delicately shaped and tinted to look old enough to be in expectation of three daughters-in-law. No, prostrate as she was upon pillows, Mrs. Charnock Poynsett did not look as if she had attained fifty years. She was lady of Compton Poynsett in her own right; and had been so early married and widowed, as to have been the most efficient parental influence her five sons had

ever known; and their beautiful young mother had been the object of their adoration from the nursery upwards, so that she laughed at people who talked of the trouble and anxiety of rearing sons.

They had all taken their cue from their senior, who had always been more to his mother than all the world besides. For several years, he being as old of his age as she was young, Mr. and Mrs. Charnock Poynsett, with scarcely eighteen years between their ages, had often been taken by strangers for husband and wife rather than son and mother. And though she knew she ought to wish for his marriage, she could not but be secretly relieved that there were no symptoms of any such event impending.

At last, during the first spring after Raymond Charnock Poynsett, Esquire, had been elected member for the little borough of Willansborough, his mother, while riding with her two youngest boys, met with an accident so severe, that in two years she had never quitted the morning-room, whither she had at first been carried. She was daily lifted to a couch, but she could endure no further motion, though her general health had become good, and her cheerfulness made her room pleasant to her sons when the rest of the house was very dreary to them.

Raymond, always the home son, would never have absented himself but for his parliamentary duties, and vibrated between London and home, until, when his mother had settled into a condition that seemed likely

to be permanent, and his two youngest brothers were at home, reading each for his examination, the one for a Government clerkship, the other for the army, he yielded to the general recommendation, and set out for a journey on the Continent.

A few weeks later came the electrifying news of his engagement to his second cousin, Cecil Charnock. It was precisely the most obvious and suitable of connections. She was the only child of the head of the family of which his father had been a cadet, and there were complications of inheritance thus happily disposed of. Mrs. Poynsett had not seen her since her earliest childhood; but she was known to have been educated with elaborate care, and had been taken to the Continent as the completion of her education, and there Raymond had met her, and sped so rapidly with his wooing, that he had been married at Venice just four weeks previously.

Somewhat less recent was the wedding of the second son, Commander Miles Charnock. (The younger sons bore their patronymic alone.) His ship had been stationed at the Cape, and there, on a hunting expedition up the country, he had been detained by a severe illness at a settler's house; and this had resulted in his marrying the eldest daughter, Anne Fraser. She had spent some months at Simon's Bay while his ship was there, and when he found himself under orders for the eastern coast of Africa, she would fain have awaited him at Glen Fraser; but he

preferred sending her home to fulfil the mission of daughterhood to his own mother.

The passage had been long and unfavourable, and the consequences to her had been so serious that when she landed she could not travel until after a few days' rest.

The marriage of the third son had been a much greater surprise. Compton Poynsett was not a family living; but the patron, hearing of Julius Charnock as a hard-working curate in a distant seaport, wrote to offer it to him; and the same letter to Mrs. Poynsett which conveyed this gratifying intelligence, also informed her of his having proposed to the daughter of the commanding officer of the regiment stationed at the town where lay his present charge. Her father enjoyed the barren honours of the Earldom of Rathforlane, an unimprovable estate in a remote corner of Ireland, burthened with successive families of numerous daughters, so that he was forced to continue in the service, and the marriage had been hastened by the embarkation of the regiment for India only two days later. The rectory had, however, been found in such a state of dilapidation, that demolition was the only cure; and thus the Reverend Julius and Lady Rosamond Charnock were to begin their married life in the family home.

The two younger sons, Francis and Charles, stood on the other side of a gap made by the loss of two

infants, and were only twenty-one and nineteen. Frank had passed through Oxford with credit, and had been promised a Government office; while Charles was intended for the army; and both had been reading with a tutor who lived at Willansborough, and was continually employed in cramming, being reported of as the best "coach" in the country. Charlie, however, had passed a week previously, and was to repair to Sandhurst in another fortnight.

At half-past four there was a light tap at Mrs. Poynsett's door, and Charlie announced, "Here's the first, Mother!" as he brought in a grey-cloaked figure; and Mrs. Poynsett took a trembling hand, and bestowed a kiss on a cheek which had languor and exhaustion in the very touch.

"She was tired to death, Mother," said Charlie, "so we did not wait for the train."

"Quite right!" and as the new comer sank into the chair he offered—"My dear, you are sadly knocked up! You were hardly fit to come."

"Thank you, I am quite well," answered the fagged timid voice.

"Hark!" as the crash of a peal of bells came up. "Dear child, you will like to rest before any fresh introductions. You shall go to your room and have some tea there."

"Thank you."

"Charlie, call Susan.—She is my boys' old nurse,

now mine. Only tell me you have good accounts rom my boy Miles."

"Oh yes;" and the hand tightly clasped the closely-written letter for which the mother's eyes felt hungry. "He sent you his love, and he will write to you next time. He was so busy, his first lieutenant was down in fever."

"Where was he?"

"Off Zanzibar—otherwise the crew was healthy—the 12th of August," she answered, squeezing out the sentences as if constrained by the mother's anxious gaze.

"And he was quite well when you parted with him?"

"Quite."

"Ah! you nursed my boy, and we must nurse you for him."

"Thank you, I am quite well." But she bit her lip, and spoke constrainedly, as if too shy and reserved to give way to the rush of emotion; but the coldness pained Mrs Poynsett, whose expansiveness was easily checked; and a brief silence was followed by Charlie's return to report that he could not find Nurse, and thought she was out with the other servants, watching for the arrival; in another moment, the approaching cheers caused him to rush out; and after many more noises, showing the excitement of the multitude and the advance of the bridal pair, during which Mrs. Poynsett lay with deepening colour and clasped hands, her nostrils dilating with anxiety and

suppressed eagerness, there entered a tall, dark, sunburnt man, bringing on his arm a little, trim, upright, girlish figure; and bending down, he exclaimed, "There, Mother, I've brought her—here's your daughter!"

Two little gloved hands were put into hers, and a kiss exchanged, while Raymond anxiously inquired for his mother's health; and she broke in by saying, "And here is Anne—Miles's Anne, just arrived."

"Ah, I did not see you in the dark," said Raymond. "There, Cecil, is a sister for you—you never had one."

Cecil was readier with greeting hand and cheek than was Anne, but at the same moment the tea equipage was brought in, and Cecil, quite naturally, and as a matter of course, began to preside over the low table, while Raymond took his accustomed chair on the further side of his mother's sofa, where he could lean over the arm and study her countenance, while she fondled the hand that he had hung over the back. He was describing the welcome at the station, and all through the village—the triumphal arches and shouts.

"But how they *did* miss you, Mother," said Charlie. "Old Gurnet wrung my hand in tears as he said, 'Yes, Sir, 'tis very fine, but it beats the heart out of it that Madam baint here to see.'"

"Good old Gurnet!" responded Raymond. "They are famously loyal. The J. C. P. crowned all, above all the Cs and Rs, I was happy to see."

"J was for Julius—not Julia," said the mother.

"No; J. H. C. and R. C. had a separate device of roses all to themselves. Hark! is that a cheer beginning again? Had we not better go into the drawing-room, Mother? it will be so many for you all together."

"Oh no, I must see you all."

The brothers hurried out with their welcome; and in another minute, a plump soft cheek was pressed to the mother's, devouring kisses were hailed on her, and a fuller sweeter tone than had yet been heard answered the welcome.

"Thank you. So kind! Here's Julius! I'll not be in your way."

"Dearest Mother, how is it with you?" as her son embraced her. "Rose has been longing to be with you."

"And we've all come together! How delicious!" cried Rosamond, enfolding Anne in her embrace; "I didn't know you were come!—See, Julius!"

But as Julius turned, a startled look came over Anne's face; and she turned so white, that Rosamond exclaimed, "My dear—what—she's faint!" And while Cecil stood looking puzzled, Rosamond had her arm round the trembling form, and disappeared with her, guided and assisted by Nurse Susan.

"Isn't she—?" exclaimed Julius, in a voice of triumph that made all smile.

"Full of sweet kindness," said Mrs. Poynsett; "but I have only seen and heard her yet, my dear Julius. Susan will take her to her room—my old one."

"Oh, thank you, Mother," said Julius, "but I hardly like that; it seems like your giving it up."

"On the contrary, it proves that I do not give it up, since I put in temporary lodgers like you.—Now Cecil is housed as you preferred, Raymond—in the wainscot-rooms."

"And where have you put that poor Mrs. Miles?" asked Raymond. "She looks quite knocked up."

"Yes, she has been very ill on the voyage, and waited at Southampton to gather strength for the journey.—I am so grateful to your good Rose, Julius.—Why, where is the boy? Vanished in her wake, I declare!"

"His venerable head is quite turned," said Frank. "I had to get inside alone, and let them drive home outside together to avoid separation."

Raymond repeated his question as to the quarters of Miles's wife.

"I had the old school-room and the bed-room adjoining newly fitted up," answered Mrs. Poynsett. "Jenny Bowater was here yesterday, and gave the finishing touches. She tells me the rooms look very nice.—Cecil, my dear, you must excuse deficiencies; I shall look to you in future."

"I hope to manage well," said Cecil. "Had I not better go up now? Will you show me the way, Raymond?"

The mother and her two younger sons remained.

"Haven't I brought you home a splendid article?" was Frank's exclamation. "Julius has got the best of it."

"I back my Cape Gooseberry," returned Charles. "She has eyes and hair and skin that my Lady can't match, and is a fine figure of a woman besides."

"Much you know of Rosamond's eyes!"

"Or you either, boxed up in the van."

"Anyway, they have made roast meat of his Reverence's heart! The other two take it much more easily."

"She's a mere chicken," said Charlie. "Who would have thought of Raymond being caught by a callow nestling?"

"And so uncommonly cool!" added Frank.

"It would take much to transform Raymond," interposed the mother. "Now, boys, away with you; I must have a little quiet, to repair myself for company after dinner."

Charlie settled her cushions with womanly skill, and followed his brother. "Well, Frank, which is the White Cat? Ah, I thought so—she's yet to come."

"Not one is fit to hold a candle to *her*. You saw

that as plain as I did, Charlie ; Eleonora beats them all."

"Ah, you're not the youngest brother, remember. It was he who brought her home at last. Come, you need not knock me down ; I shall never see anyone to surpass the mother, and I'll have no one till I do.'

CHAPTER II.

THE POPULATION OF COMPTON POYNSETT.

"He wanted a wife his braw hoose to keep,
But favour wi' wooin' was fashous to seek."
Laird o' Cockpen.

IN the bright lamp-light of the dining table, the new population first fully beheld one another, and understood one another's looks.

There was much family resemblance between the five brothers. All were well-grown well-made men, strong and agile, the countenance pleasing, rather square of mould, eyebrows straight and thick, nose well cut and short, chin firm and resolute looking, and the complexion very dark in Raymond, Frank, and the absent Miles. Frank's eyes were soft, brown, rather pensive, and absent in expression; but Raymond's were much deeper and darker, and had a steadfast gravity, that made him be viewed as formidable, especially as he had lost all the youthful glow of colouring that mantled in his brother's olive cheek; and he had a short, thick, curly brown beard, while Frank had only attained to a black moustache, that

might almost have been drawn on his lip with charcoal.

Charlie was an exception—fair, blue eyed, rosy, and with a soft feminine contour of visage, which had often drawn on him reproaches for not being really the daughter all his mother's friends desired for her.

And Julius, with the outlines of the others, was Albino, with transparent skin mantling with colour that contrasted with his snowy hair, eyebrows, and the lashes, veiling eyes of a curious coral hue, really not unpleasing under their thick white fringes, but most inconveniently short of sight, although capable of much work; in fact, he was a curiously perfect pink-and-white edition of his dark and bronzed brother the sailor.

The dark eyes came from the father's side; Cecil had them, and very observing orbs they seemed to be, travelling about from one face to another, and into every corner of the room, scrutinizing every picture or piece of plate, and trying to see into the conservatory, which had a glass door opening from one end of the room. She was the youngest of the brides, and her features and form seemed hardly developed, nor had she attained the air of a matron; her fashionable dress of crisp white worked muslin with blue trimmings, and blue ribbons in her brown hair, only gave her the air of a young girl at her first party, in spite of her freedom from all shyness as she sat at the head of the table in contented self-

possession, her little slender figure as upright as a perfect spine could make it.

Very different was the bride on Raymond's right hand. She was of middle height, soft, round, and plump, carrying her head a little tenderly on one side with a delightful *dégagée* kind of ease, and air of vivacious indolence. Her complexion was creamy and colourless, her nose rather *retroussé*, her lips full, and parting in a delicious roguish smile, answering to the sleepily twinkling eyes, whose irides seemed to shade so imperceptibly into the palest grey, that there was no telling where the pupils ended, especially as the lids were habitually half closed, as if weighed down by the black length of their borders. The habit of arching up one or other of the eyebrows, in surprise or interrogation, gave a drollery to the otherwise nonchalant sweetness of the countenance. The mass of raven black hair was only adorned by a crimson ribbon, beneath which it had been thrust into a net, with a long thing that had once been a curl on the shoulder of the white tumbled bodice worn over a grey skirt which looked as if it had done solitary duty for the five weeks since the marriage, and was but slightly relieved by a crimson sash.

Rosamond made some apology when she saw Cecil's dainty equipment. "Dressed, you correct little thing! You put me to shame; but I had no notion which box my evening things are in, and it would have been serious to irritate the whole concern."

"And she was some time with Anne," added Julius.

"Ah! with my good will Anne should not have been here!" rejoined Rosamond. "Didn't I meet old Mrs. Nurse at your threshold, with an invitation from Mrs. Poynsett to dine with her in her room, and didn't we find the bird flown at the first stroke of the gong?"

"Oh, I am very well!" repeated Anne.

Yet she was far more colourless than Julius, for her complexion was not only faded by sickness, but was naturally of the whitest blonde tint; the simple coils of her hair "lint white," and her eyes of the lightest tint of pure blue. The features were of Scottish type, all the more so from being exaggerated by recent illness; but they were handsome enough to show that she must have been a bonnie lassie when her good looks were unimpaired. Her figure far surpassed in height that of both the other ladies, and was very slender, bending with languor and fatigue in spite of her strenuous attempts to straighten it. She was clad in a perfectly plain, almost quaker-looking light dove-coloured silk dress, fitting closely, and unrelieved by any ribbon or ornament of any description, so that her whole appearance suggested nothing but the word "washed out."

It was clear that to let her alone was merciful, and there was no lack of mutual communications among the rest. Frank and Charlie gave their account of the condition of the game.

"Do you let your tenants shoot rabbits?" exclaimed Cecil, as if scandalized. "We never do at Dunstone."

"It prevents an immense amount of discontent and ill-will and underhand work," said Raymond.

"My father never will listen to any nonsense about rabbits," proceeded Cecil. "If you once begin there is no end to it, they are sure to encroach. He just sends them a basket of game at the beginning and end of the season."

"By-the-bye," said Raymond, "I hope ours have all been sent out as usual."

"I can answer for a splendid one at our wedding breakfast," said Rosamond. "The mess-man who came to help was lost in admiration. Did you breakfast on ortolans, Cecil?"

"Or on nightingales' tongues?" added Charlie.

"You might as well say fatted dormice and snails," said Frank. "One would think the event had been eighteen hundred years ago."

"Poor Frank! he's stuffed so hard that it is bursting out at all his pores!" exclaimed Charlie.

"Ah! you have the advantage of your elder, Master Charles!" said Raymond, with a paternal sound of approbation.

"Till next time," said Frank. "Now, thank goodness, mine is once for all!"

The conversation drifted away to Venice and the homeward journey, which Raymond and Cecil seemed

to have spent in unremitting sight-seeing. The quantities of mountains, cathedrals, and pictures, they had inspected was quite appalling.

"How hard you must have worked!" exclaimed Rosamond. "Had you never a day's rest out of the thirty?"

"Had we, Cecil? I believe not," said Raymond.

"Sundays?" gasped Anne's low voice at his elbow.

"Indeed," triumphantly returned Cecil, "between English service and High Mass, and Benediction, and the public gardens, and listening to the band, we had not a single blank Sunday."

Anne started and looked aghast; and Raymond said, "The opportunity was not to be wasted, and Cecil enjoyed everything with unwearied vigour."

"Why, what else should we have done? It would have been very dull and stupid to have stayed in together," said Cecil, with a world of innocent wonder in her eyes. Then turning to her neighbour, "Surely, Julius, you went about and saw things!"

"The sea at Filey Bridge, and the Church Congress at Leeds," he answered, smiling.

"Very shocking, is not it, Cecil?" said Rosamond, with mock gravity; "but he must be forgiven, for he was tired to death! I used to think, for my part, that lovers were a sort of mild lunatics, never to be troubled or trusted with any earthly thing; but that's one of the things modern times have changed! As he was to be going, all the clerical staff of St. Awdry's

must needs have their holiday and leave him to do their work; indeed, one was sent off here. For six weeks I never saw him, except when he used to rush in to say he couldn't stay; and when at last we were safe in the coupé, he fairly went to sleep before we got to the first station.—Hush! you *know* you did! And no wonder, for he had been up two nights with some sort of infidel who was supposed to be dying. Then, that first week at Filey, he used to bring out his poetry books as the proper sort of thing, and try to read them to me on the sands; but by the time he had got to the bottom of a page, I used to hear the words dragging out slower and slower—

> "Whereon the—lily—maid—of—Astolat
> Lay—smiling—like—a—star-fish——fast——asleep."

Wherewith Rosamond dropped her head and closed her eyes; while the brothers shouted with mirth, except Frank, whose countenance was "of one hurt on a vulnerable side."

"Disrespect to Elaine? Eh, Frank?" said Charlie; "how many pegs has Julius gone down in your estimation?"

Frank would not commit himself, but he was evidently at the era of sensitiveness on the poetical side. Cecil spoke for him. "How very provoking! What did you do to him, Rosamond?"

"I kept off the sand-flies! I can't say but I was glad of a little rest, for I had been packing up for

the whole family for ten days past, with interludes of rushing out into the town; for whatever we hadn't forgotten, the shops had not sent home! Oh! what a paradise of quiet it was under the rocks at Filey—wasn't it, Julius?"

"We will go there again next time we have a chance," said Julius, looking blissful.

"I would never go again to the same place," cried Cecil. "That's not the way to acquire new ideas."

"We are too old to acquire new ideas, my dear," drawled Rosamond sleepily.

"What did you go to the Church Congress for?" asked Charlie.

"I hope Julius was awake by that time," said Frank.

"Not if we are to have all the new ideas tried on us," said Raymond, drily.

"I went to a congress once!" exclaimed Cecil.

"Indeed!" said her husband, surprised.

"Yes. We thought we ought to encourage them. It was the congress of Sunday-school managers for our archdeaconry."

"Did you acquire any new ideas?" asked Frank; while Rosamond's very eyelashes seemed to curl with suppressed diversion.

"Oh yes. We explained our system of tickets, and the Archdeacon said it was a very good one, and ought to be adopted everywhere."

This mode of acquisition of new ideas was quite

too much for Julius and Charlie, who both exploded; but Frank retained composure enough to ask, "Did you explain it in person?"

"No. We made Mr. Venn."

"The school-master?" said Julius.

"No. He is *our* clergyman, and he always does as *we* tell him; and *so* Dunstone is quite the model parish of the archdeaconry."

Julius could not help making an odd little bend of the head, half deferential, half satirical; and Raymond said, "Cecil, I believe it rests with you to make the move." An ingenuous girlish blush mantled on her cheek as she looked towards Rosamond and moved.

The drawing-room adjoined the dining-room, and likewise had a glass door leading into the conservatory; but this, like the other windows, was concealed by the pale-blue damask curtains that descended from cornices gilded like the legs of the substantial chairs and sofas. There was, however, no lack of modern light cane and basket seats round the fire, and it looked cheery and comfortable. Rosamond put an arm round Anne's waist—"Poor tired dear, come and lie on the sofa."

"Oh no, I couldn't. The gentlemen will come in."

"All brothers! What, will you only be satisfied with an easy-chair! A charming room, and a charming fire!"

"Not so nice as a library," said Cecil, stabbing the

fire with the poker as a sort of act of possession. "We always sit in the library at Dunstone. State rooms are horrid."

"This only wants to be littered down," said Rosamond. "That's my first task in fresh quarters, banishing some things and upsetting the rest, and strewing our own about judiciously. There are the inevitable wax-flowers. I have regular blarney about their being so lovely, that it would just go to my heart to expose them to the boys."

"You have always been on the move," said Cecil, who was standing by the table examining the ornaments.

"You may say so! there are not many of Her Majesty's garrisons that I have not had experience of, except my native country that I wasn't born in. It was very mean of them never once to send us to Ireland."

"Where were you born?" said Cecil, neither of the two catching at the bull which perhaps Rosamond had allowed to escape by way of trying them.

"At Plymouth. Dick and I were both born at Plymouth, and Maurice at Scutari; then we were in the West Indies; the next two were born all up and down in Jamaica and all the rest of the islands—Tom and Terry—dear boys, I've got the charge of them now they are left at school. Three more are Canadians; and little Nora is the only Irish-born one amongst us."

"I thought you said you had never been in Ireland."

"Never quartered there, but on visits at Rathforlane," said Rosamond. "Our ten years at home we have been up and down the world, till at last you see I've ended where I began—at Plymouth."

"Oh what a lovely Florentine mosaic!" exclaimed Cecil, who had taken but slight interest in this itinerary. "It is just like a weight at Dunstone." Then opening a miniature-case, "Who is this—Mrs. Poynsett when she was young?"

"Most likely," said Rosamond. "It is like her now, and very like Charlie."

"Yes. Charles is quite unlike the family."

"What family?" said Rosamond.

"The Charnocks, of course. Raymond is a perfect Charnock!"

"A vast advantage," murmured Rosamond.

"Of course," said Cecil, taking it quite seriously. "No one else could be the same thing to us. Papa said there was not a match in the whole world that could have gratified him so much."

"How old are you, Cecil?" quoth Rosamond, with a ripple in her voice.

"Oh, his age was no matter. I don't like young men. That's not the drawback; no, it is that horrid Poynsett at the end of the name."

"You see you had better have waived your objections to youth, and taken a younger son."

"I couldn't," said this naïve young person. "Besides, there is so much more of a field for me here than at Dunstone since Papa's marriage."

Whatever Rosamond had on the tip of her tongue was averted by the entrance of the three younger brothers. Julius seated himself beside her in the cushioned fireside corner; and Cecil asked where Raymond was.

"Just stepped in to see my mother," said Frank. "This room opens into hers. Will you come to them?"

"Not yet," said Cecil. "I want you to tell me about the neighbourhood."

"Just what I want," said Rosamond. "Whenever I ask, Julius always says there's Dr. Easterby."

Frank and Charlie burst out laughing.

"Dr. Easterby is one of the greatest men in the English Church," said Julius.

"Precisely! But what is the regiment at Backsworth?" and as Charlie named it, "Oh, what fun! That's where Laurie Cookson exchanged. He will be sure to send us cards for everything."

"At Dunstone we never used to go to garrison gaieties," said Cecil gravely.

"Oh! I'm a military pariah," said Rosamond, hastily.

"Who are the land-owners?" continued Cecil. "There was a place I saw from the line, but Raymond didn't hear when I asked whose it was. Close to the station, I mean."

"That is Sirenwood," said Charles. "Sir Harry Vivian's. He is just come back there with his two daughters."

"I thought Emily Vivian was dead," said Julius. "You don't mean *that* woman!"

"*That* woman?" laughed his wife. "What has she done to be a *that* woman?"

"Offended his Reverence," said Frank, in that sort of jocose tone which betrays annoyance.

"A heartless mischievous woman!" said Julius.

Rosamond cocked up her left eyebrow with an ineffably droll look, which encouraged Charlie to say, "Such fierceness can only be prompted by personal experience. Look out, Rosamond!"

"Come 'fess, Julius," said she, merrily. "'Fess and make it up."

"I—I have nothing to confess," said Julius seriously.

"Hasn't he indeed?" said she, looking at the brothers.

"Oh! don't ask us," said Charlie. "His youthful indiscretions were over long before our eyes had risen above the horizon!"

"Do you mean that they have really come home to live here?" demanded Julius, with singular indifference to the personal insinuations.

"I am sorry it is so painful to you," said Frank, somewhat ironically; "but Sir Harry thinks it right to return and end his days among his own people."

"Is he ill, then?"

"I can't gratify you so far," returned Frank; "he is a fine old fellow of sixty-five. Just what humbugging papers call a regular specimen of an old English gentleman," he added to Cecil.

"Humbugging indeed, I should hope," muttered Julius. "The old English gentleman has reason to complain!"

"There's the charity of the clergy!" exclaimed Frank. "No forgiveness for a man who has spent a little in his youth!"

"As an essential of the old English gentleman?" asked Julius.

"At any rate, the poor old fellow has been punished enough," said Charlie.

"But what is it? Tell me all about it," said Cecil. "I am sure my father would not wish me to associate with dissipated people."

"Ah! Cecil," said Rosamond. "You'll have to take refuge with the military, after all!"

"It is just this," said Charlie. "Sir Harry and his only son were always extravagant, one as bad as the other—weren't they, Julius? Phil Bowater told me all about it, and how Tom Vivian lost fifteen thousand pounds one Derby Day, and was found dead in his chambers the next morning, they said from an overdose of chloroform for neuralgia. Then the estate was so dipped that Sir Harry had to give up the estate to his creditors, and live on an allowance abroad

or at watering-places till now, when he has managed to come home. That is to say, the house is really leased to Lady Tyrrell, and he is in a measure her guest—very queer it must be for him in his own house."

"Is Lady Tyrrell *that* woman?" asked Rosamond.

"I conclude so," said Charlie. "She was the eldest daughter, and married Lord Tyrrell, who died about two years ago. She has no children, so she has taken the family in charge, patches up Sir Harry's affairs with her jointure, and chaperones her sister."

"And what is she like?"

"Ask Frank," said Charlie, slily.

"No!" said Frank, with dignity. "I shall say no more, I only excite prejudice."

"You are right, Frank," said Julius, who had evidently recovered from the shock. "It is not fair to judge people now from what they were eleven years ago. They have had some terrible lessons, and may be much changed."

"Ay," said Frank; "and they have been living in an atmosphere congenial to you, at Rockpier, and are hand and glove with all the St. Chrysostom folk there. What do you say to that, Julius? I can tell you they are enchanted with your curate!"

"They are not in this parish."

"No, but they turn up here—the ladies, at least—at all the services at odd times that Bindon has begun with."

"Ah! by-the-by, is Herbert Bowater come?"

"Yes, the whole family came over to his installation in Mrs. Hornblower's lodgings."

"I saw him this morning, poor old Herbs," added Frank, "looking uncommonly as if he felt himself in a strait waistcoat."

"What, are there two curates?" demanded Cecil, in a tone of reprobation.

Julius made a gesture of assent, with a certain humorous air of deprecation, which, however, was lost upon her.

"We never let Mr. Venn have one," continued Cecil, "except one winter when he was ill, and then not a young one. Papa says idle young clergymen are not to be encouraged."

"I am entirely of Mr. Charnock's opinion. But if I have exceeded the Dunstone standard, it was not willingly. Herbert Bowater is the son of some old friends of my mother's, who wanted to keep their son near home, and made it their request that I would give him a title."

"And the Bowaters are the great feature in the neighbourhood," added Frank. "Herbert tells me there are wonderful designs for entertaining the brides."

"What do they consist of?" asked Rosamond.

"All the component parts of a family," said Frank. "The eldest daughter is a sort of sheet-anchor to my mother, as well as her own. The eldest son is at home now. He is in the army."

"In the light dragoons?" asked Rosamond. "Oh! then I knew him at Edinburgh! A man with yellow whiskers, and the next thing to a stutter."

"I declare, Julius, she is as good as any army list," exclaimed Charlie.

"There's praise!" cried Frank. "The army list is his one book! What a piece of luck to have you to coach him up in it!"

"I dare say Rosamond can tell me lots of wrinkles for my outfit," said Charles.

"I should hope so, having rigged out Dick for the line, and Maurice for the artillery!"

Charlie came and leant on the mantel-shelf, and commenced a conversation *sotto voce* on the subject nearest his heart; while Cecil continued her catechism.

"Are the Bowaters intellectual?"

"Jenny is very well read," said Julius, "a very sensible person."

"Yes," said Frank; "she was the only person here that so much as tried to read Browning. But if Cecil wants intellect, she had better take to the Duncombes, the queerest firm I ever fell in with. He makes the turf a regular profession, actually gets a livelihood out of his betting-book; and she is in the strong-minded line—woman's rights, and all the rest of it."

"We never had such people at Dunstone," said Cecil. "Papa always said that the evil of being in parliament was the having to be civil to everybody."

Just then Raymond came back with intelligence that his mother was about to go to bed, and to call his wife to wish her good night. All went in succession to do the same.

"My dear," she said to Anne, "I hoped you were in bed."

"I thought I would wait for family worship."

"I am afraid we don't have prayers at night, my dear. We must resume them in the morning, now Raymond and Julius are come."

Poor Anne looked all the whiter, and only mumbled out a few answers to the kind counsels lavished upon her. Mrs. Poynsett was left to think over her daughters-in-law.

Lady Rosamond did not occupy her much. There was evidently plenty of good strong love between her and her husband; and though her training might not have been the best for a clergyman's wife, there was substance enough in both to shake down together in time.

But it was Raymond who made her uneasy—Raymond, who ever since his father's death had been more than all her other sons to her. She had armed herself against the pang of not being first with him, and now she was full of vague anxiety at the sense that she still held her old position. Had he not sat all the evening in his own place by her sofa, as if it were the very kernel of home and of repose? And whenever a sense of duty prompted her to suggest

fetching his wife, had he not lingered, and gone on talking? It was indeed of Cecil; but how would she have liked his father, at the honeymoon's end, to prefer talking of her to talking with her? "She has been most carefully brought up, and is very intelligent and industrious," said Raymond. His mother could not help wondering whether a Roman son might not thus have described a highly accomplished Greek slave, just brought home for his mother's use.

CHAPTER III.

PARISH EXPLORATIONS.

"A cry more tuneable
Was never holla'd to, nor cheer'd with horn,
In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly:
Judge, when you hear.—But, soft; what nymphs are these?"
Midsummer Night's Dream.

IT was quite true that Cecil Charnock Poynsett was a very intelligent industrious creature, very carefully brought up—nay, if possible, a little too much so. "A little wholesome neglect" had been lacking.

The only child of her parents who had lived to see a second birthday was sure to be the centre of solicitude. She had not been spoilt in the usual acceptation of the word, for she had no liberty, fewer indulgences and luxuries than many children, and never was permitted to be naughty; but then she was quite aware that each dainty or each pleasure was granted or withheld from a careful consideration of her welfare, and that nothing came by chance with her. And on her rare ebullitions of self-will, Mamma, governess, nurse, nay even Papa, were all in sorrowful

commotion till their princess had been brought to a sense of the enormity of her fault.

She lost her mother at fourteen, but the same anxious training was carried on by her father; and after three years he married her mother's most intimate friend, avowedly that the perfect system might be continued. Cecil's gaieties as a come-out young lady were selected on the same judicious principles as her childish diversions; and if ever the Dunstone family favoured an entertainment not to their taste, it was after a debate on the need of condescension and good-nature. She had, however, never had a season in London—a place her father hated; but she was taken abroad as soon as she was deemed old enough thoroughly to appreciate what she was to see there; and in Switzerland her cousin Raymond, who had at different times visited Dunstone, overtook the party, and ere long made his proposals. He was the very man to whom two or three centuries ago Mr. Charnock would have betrothed the heiress in her infancy; and Cecil had never liked anyone so well, feeling that her destiny came to a proper culmination in bestowing her hand on the most eligible Charnock, an M.P., and just a step above her father in rank and influence.

Her step-mother was under orders to spend the winter in Italy, and the wedding had therefore taken place in Venice, so that Cecil might finish her journey as a wife. She had been very happy and fully

occupied; Raymond, being younger and stronger than her parents, was more competent to escort her to every height or depth to which she wished to go, hunted up information for her, and was her most obedient servant, only resisting any prolongation of the journey beyond the legitimate four weeks; nor indeed had Cecil been desirous of deferring her introduction to her new sphere.

There she stood, her hair and pretty Parisian winter dress arranged to perfection, contemplating with approval the sitting-room that had been appropriated to her, the October sunshine lighting up the many-tinted trees around the smooth-shaven dewy lawn, and a bright fire on the hearth, shelves and chiffoniers awaiting her property, and piles of parcels, suggestive of wedding presents, awaiting her hand. She was standing at the table, turning out her travelling-bag with the comfortable sensation that it was not to be immediately re-packed, and had just disinterred a whole library of note-books, when her husband opened the door. "I believe Jenkins is waiting for your appearance, to bring in the urn, my dear."

"I'm coming; but surely there ought to be a bell or gong to assemble the family."

"It might disturb my mother. What sleep she gets is in the morning. I never go to her till eleven o'clock, unless I am going out for the day."

"And what will she want me to do for her?" asked Cecil, glancing at her empty shelves.

"A woman's tact will soon find out. All I wish is that she should be your first object."

It was a much larger *all* than could be realized by the son whose happiest moments had been spent in devotion to her, and who thought the motherless girl must rejoice doubly in such a mother.

"But I am free till eleven," said Cecil.

"Free always, I hope," he returned, with a shade of vexation.

Therewith they descended the broad stairs into the panelled hall, where a great fire was blazing on the hearth, and Rosamond and the two young brothers were standing chatting merrily before it.

Julius, she said, had his primary sermon heavy on his mind, and had risen before day to attack it; and she sped away to summon him from Mrs. Poynsett's beautiful old dressing-room, where he sat writing amid all the old associations.

Anne was discoveed hanging over the dining-room fire, looking whiter and more exhausted than the night before, having indeed been the first to come down-stairs. She was rebuked for fatiguing herself, and again murmured something about family worship.

"We must begin to-morrow," said Raymond. "We have got a chaplain now."

Julius, however, on entering excused himself, saying that after Sunday he should be at Matins at nine

o'clock; whereupon Anne looked at him in mute astonishment.

Raymond, feeling that he ought to cultivate the solitary sister-in-law, began asking about Miles; but unlike the typical colonist, she was very silent, and her replies were monosyllabic, till Rosamond created a diversion by talking to Frank; and then Raymond elicited that Glen Fraser was far up the country—King Williamstown nearer than any other town. They had sent thither for a doctor for Miles, and he stayed one night, but said that Mother's treatment was quite right; and as it was thirty miles off he did not come again. Thirty miles! what sort of roads? Not bad for waggons. It only took two days to get there if the river was not in flood. Had she not been married there? Yes, they all rode in thither for the purpose. Was it the nearest church, then? There was one only nine miles off, to which Papa went when there was service—one Sunday in three, "for he is an Episcopalian, you know."

"And not your mother?" asked Cecil.

"I don't think she was at home," said Anne.

"Then had you a Presbyterian Kirk?" asked Cecil, remembering that in Scotland gentle blood and Anglicanism did not go together as uniformly as she believed them to do in England.

"There was one at Schneyder's Kloof, but that was Dutch."

"Then did you go nowhere?" asked Cecil.

"There was Mr. Pilgrim's."

"A clergyman?"

"No, a settler. He used to pray and expound every Sunday."

"What does he call himself?" said Cecil, growing more severe.

"I don't know," said Anne. "He gathers together a little flock of all denominations, who only care to hear the word."

"Such a voice in the wilderness as often does good service," said Julius, with a perception that the side with which he least agreed best deserved support.

He and Rosamond were bent on a tour of parochial inspection, as were Raymond and Cecil on a more domestic one, beginning with the gardens.

Cecil was the first lady down-stairs, all in claret colour trimmed with grey fur, with a little fur and velvet cap upon her head.

"There! it is a clear morning, and you can see the view," said Raymond, opening the hall door.

"Very prettily undulating ground," she said, standing on the steps, and looking over a somewhat rapid slope scattered with trees to the opposite side of the valley, where a park with a red mansion in the midst gleamed out among woods of green, red, orange, and brown tints. "How you are shut in! That great Spanish chestnut must be a perfect block when its leaves are out. My father would never let it stand so near the house."

"It is too near, but it was planted at the birth of my mother's brother."

"Who died?"

"Yes, at seven years old. It was her first grief."

"Then it would vex her if you cut it."

Raymond laughed. "It is hers, not mine."

"I forgot." There was a good deal in the tone; but she added, "What is that place opposite?"

"Sirenwood. It belongs to Sir Harry Vivian; but he does not live there."

"Yes, he does," said Cecil. "Your brothers say he has come back with his two daughters."

"There is only one unmarried."

"There is a widow come to keep house for him—Lady Tyrrell."

"Very likely," said Raymond; "my mother only writes with difficulty, so I hear little when I am from home."

"Is it true that they are horrid people, very dissipated, and not fit for me to associate with?"

"That is putting it strongly," said Raymond quietly. "They are not likely to be very desirable acquaintances for you, but there is no reason you should not associate with them on ordinary terms of courtesy."

"Ah! I understand—as member's wife."

"I don't see what that has to do with it," said Raymond. "Ah! Rosamond!" as she came down in

a Galway cloak over her black velveteen, "on the way to view your domain?"

"Yes, and yours," she said, nodding to Cecil. "You appreciate such English apple-pie order. It looks as if you never suffered a stray leaf to dance without an old woman to hunt it down. And what's that red house smiling across the valley?"

"Sirenwood," repeated Raymond; then to Julius he said, "Did you know it was inhabited again?"

"Frank said so," answered Julius, without further remark, giving his arm to his wife, who clasped both hands on it; while the other couple looked on as if doubtful whether this were a trying duty incumbent on them.

"What is it all about?" said Rosamond, as they walked down the avenue of walnuts leading to the iron gates in the opposite direction from Sirenwood. "Which of you was *that woman's* victim? Was it a sailor love of Miles's? I hope not! That poor little African might not stand a gay ghost cropping up again."

"Miles is far removed from the conventional sailor."

"Then it is reduced to the grave Raymond."

"I wish I had betrayed nothing."

"Now you may as well proceed to betray the rest instead of leaving me to exercise my fancy."

"It is no secret, only such things are best not brought up again. Camilla Vivian was poor

Raymond's *grande passion*, and you may imagine what a grief that was to my mother, especially as the poor brother was then living—one of the most fascinating, dangerous men I ever saw; and the whole tone of the place was ultra gay and thoughtless, the most reckless extravagance. However, he was set upon it, and my mother was forced to consent to the engagement. She seemed equally devoted to him, till she met Lord Tyrrell at some country house, and then a quarrel was picked, either by her mother or herself about my mother retaining the headship of her own house. It was a palpable excuse, but it served to break the affair off, and Raymond was cruelly cut up. My mother made herself everything to him from that moment, gave up all her former habits to be with him, sent the little boys to school, and fairly dragged him through the trouble!"

"How long ago was it?"

"Ten years—yes, ten years. So far as ceasing to care a straw for a heartless woman like that, he has got over it, no doubt; but it has made a graver man of him for life, and I doubt whether, but for my mother's accident, he ever would have married."

"Did you marry for your mother's sake, Julius, or only tell her so?"

"For shame, my Lady Mischief!"

"And do you think the fair Camilla returned with plans that she finds disconcerted?"

"How can I tell? I have not seen her since I

was a lad of eighteen.—Ah! how d'ye do, Betty?" in a tone of relief; "you've not seen my wife."

This was the first of a long series of introductions. Compton Poynsett was a straggling village, with the church, schools, and rectory, ten minutes' walk from the park gates. It had not been neglected, so that Julius had not the doubtful satisfaction of coming like a missionary or reformer. The church, though not exactly as with his present lights he would have made it, was in respectable order, and contained hardly anything obnoxious to his taste; the schools were well built, properly officered, and the children under such discipline that Rosamond declared she could no more meddle with them than with her father's regiment.

The Rectory was at that moment level with the ground, and Julius explaining the plans, when up came the senior curate. Mr. Bindon, whom she, as well as Julius, greeted as an old friend, was the typical modern priest, full of his work, and caring for nothing besides, except a Swiss mountain once a year; a slight, spare, small, sallow man, but with an enormous power of untiring energy.

Scarcely had Rosamond shaken hands with him, standing where her drawing-room rug was to be in future days, when a merry whistle came near, and over the wall from the churchyard leapt, first a black retriever, secondly a Skye terrier, thirdly a bull ditto, fourthly a young man, or rather an enormous

boy, who for a moment stood amazed and disconcerted at the unexpectedly worshipful society into which he had jumped!

"Ha! Herbert! is that you?" laughed Julius.

"I beg your pardon!" he breathlessly exclaimed. "I was just taking the short cut! I had no idea—Here, Mungo, you ruffian!" as the Skye was investigating Lady Rosamond's boot.

"Oh, I like him of all things! I am glad to welcome you to our future house!" as she held out her hand to the Reverend Herbert Bowater, the junior curate, a deacon of a fortnight's standing, whose round open happy blue eyes, ruddy cheeks, merry lips, and curly light hair, did not seem in keeping with the rigidly straight collar and waistcoat, and the long black coat, at present plentifully streaked with green tree-moss, while his boots and trousers looked as if they had partaken of the mud-bath which his dogs had evidently been wallowing in.

"Off! off!" were his words, as he shook hands with his rectoress. "Get away, Rollo!" with an energetic shove of the foot to the big dog, who was about to shake his dripping coat for the lady's special benefit. "I saw you arrive last evening," he said, in the conversational tone of a gentlemanly school-boy; "didn't you find it very cold?"

"Not very. I did not see you, though."

"He was organizing the cheers," said Mr. Bindon.

"You shone in that, Bowater. They kept such good time."

"You were very good to cheer us at all," said Julius, "coming in the wake of the Squire as we did."

"The best of it was," said the junior, "that Charlie was so awfully afraid that he and poor Miles's wife would be taken for the Squire, that he dashed in on his way to warn me to choke them off. If she hadn't been ill, I must have set the boys on for a lark! How is she, though?" he asked in a really kind tone.

"She looks very ill, poor thing," said Julius.

Here the bull terrier became assiduous in his attentions to Rosamond; and between his master's calls and apologies, and her caresses and excuses, not much more was heard, till Julius asked with mock gravity, "And are these all you've brought over, Herbert?"

"Yes, all; I'd half a mind to bring the two greyhounds, but my father thought they would get into trouble in the preserves, and there isn't room at Mrs. Hornblower's place," he answered, with apologetic simplicity.

"What a pity Durham has been reduced!" said Mr. Bindon drily. "It would have been the right preferment for Bowater. The Bishop was obliged by statute to keep a pack of hounds."

"But, Sir," expostulated the deacon, turning to the

Rector, colouring all over his honest rosy face, "you don't object! You know, of course, I've given up sport," he added ruefully; "but only just as companions!—Ain't you, Rollo?" he added, almost with tears in his eyes, and a hand on the smooth black head, belonging to such a wise benignant face, that Rosamond was tempted to pronounce the dog the more clerical looking of the two.

"You are very welcome," said Julius, laughing, "provided you can manage with the old women's cats. I should find such companions rather awkward in pastoral visits."

"I'll teach them, Sir! You may depend on it! We did have a little flare-up yesterday, but I showed them the sense of it. You might teach those dogs anything!—Ha! what then, Tartar! Halloo, Mungo! Rats, rats, rats!"

A prodigious scratching and snorting was audible in what had been a cellar of the quondam Rectory; and Rollo, becoming excited, dashed up to the scene of action, with a deep bass war-cry, while, to Rosamond's great amusement, "rats" was no less a peal to Rector and senior; and for the next quarter of an hour the three clergymen moved bricks, poked with their sticks, and cheered on the chase till the church clock struck one, the masons began to return from dinner, and the sounds of the bell at the Hall recalled the party to order.

"There, Rose! Our first day!" said Julius, aghast.

"You'd better come to lunch at my rooms," said the young Curate eagerly. "Do! Mother has brought the jolliest hamper! Game pie, and preserved magnum-bonums, and pears off the old jargonelle.—Come, Lady Rosamond, do.—Come along, Bindon! There's such a dish of damson cheese! Do!"

That "*do*," between insinuation and heartiness, was so boyish, that it was quite irresistible to the lady, who consented eagerly, while Julius wrote a word or two on a card, which he despatched to the Hall by the first child he encountered. In a few minutes they reached the nice clean bay-windowed room over the village shop, comically like an undergraduate's, in spite of the mother's and sister's recent touches.

There ensued a resolute quieting of the dogs, and a vigorous exertion of hospitality, necessitating some striding up and down stairs, and much shouting to Mrs. Hornblower and her little niece, who rejoiced in the peculiar name of Dilemma; while Rosamond petted Tartar upon her lap, and the two elder clergymen, each with an elbow against the window-frame and a knee on the seat, held council, based on the Rector's old knowledge of the territory and the Curate's recent observations during his five weeks' sojourn.

The plans to be put in force next week were arranged during the meal, and the junior observed that he would walk home to-night and back on

Saturday evening, since after that he should be tied pretty fast.

And he started with Julius and Rosamond on their further progress, soon, however, tumbling over another stone wall with all his dogs, and being only heard hallooing to them as they yelped after the larks.

"That is a delicious boy!" said Rosamond, laughing merrily.

"A nice fellow—but we mustn't make it a custom to be always going in to partake of his hampers, or we shall prey inordinately on Mrs. Bowater's preserves."

"He was just like the hero of

'Oh, I have a plum-cake,
And a rare feast I'll make.'

I do like a boy with a sweet tooth!"

"Like him! Of course I do. The Bowaters are like one's own kindred! I only hope I shall not spoil him."

"Hasn't his mother done that for you?"

"I wish he had spent a year or two at Cuddesdon! I ought to have seen him before consenting to give him a title at once, but his father and Jenny wished it so much. Ah! come in here. Bindon said Lucy Martin was a case for a lady."

Rosamond's hearty good-nature was much more at ease among ailing old women than prim school-

children, and she gave great satisfaction in the cottages.

Julius did not of course come as a stranger, and had a general impression as to names and families; but he had been absent, except on short visits, for five years, so that Rosamond declared that this was a staple of his conversation: "Then it was Tom Deane—no, it was John Deane that married Blake's son—no, it was Blake's daughter that died who is living in the next house."

They finished with a long and miry lane, lying along the valley, and leading to the cottages of a little clan, the chief of whom seemed to be a large-boned lively-eyed old dame, who after minute inquiries after 'the Lady Poynsett," went on, "And be it true, Master Julius, as that young gentleman of Squire Bowater's is one of your passons?"

Julius admitted the fact.

"And be ye going to put he up in the pulpit to preach to we? 'Pon my word of honour, says I to Sally when her telled I, we shall have little Dick out of the infant school next!"

"We're all young, Betty! Can't you put up with anyone that is not older than yourself! I'm afraid he would hardly be able to get up the pulpit stair."

The Rector's reply delighted Betty; but she returned to the charge. "No, no, Sir, I be coming to hear ye next Sunday. Sally have turned my black

bonnet a purpose. It be one of the Lady Poynsett's, as her gave I when my old gentleman was took two years after the Squire—when bonnets was bonnets, you know, Ma'am. Now tell me true, be ye to preach morning or arternoon, Sir?"

"In the morning, I hope, Betty."

"Then I'll be there, Master Julius, to the third seat from the front; but it ain't becoming for a woman of my age, seventy-nine come Christmas, to sit under a slip of a lad as hasn't got the taste of the birch off his back."

"That's too bad, Betty," broke in Rosamond, speaking out of conviction. "Mr. Bowater isn't so young as he looks, and he was too good a boy ever to need the birch."

"All the wuss for he," retorted the undaunted Betty. "Spare the rod, and spile the child."

The village wit was left triumphant, and Julius proposed to return by a cross-road leading into the plantations. Suddenly a scud of rain mixed with whirling yellow leaves sent them hurrying into a cart-shed, where, with a sudden start, they found themselves rushing in on someone. Who was it? A girl —a young lady. That was evident, as Rosamond panted out, "I beg your pardon!" and the next moment there was the exclamation, "Mr. Julius Charnock! You don't remember me? Eleonora Vivian."

"Miss Vivian! you have the advantage of me,"

said Julius, a little stiffly. "Let me introduce my wife."

The hands met, and Rosamond perceived in the failing light a very fine looking maiden, with a superbly carried head and neck, simply dressed in grey cloth. "Are you sheltering here, or are you sketching?" she asked, seeing some paper and drawing materials.

"I was giving a lesson. See," exhibiting some bold outlines on large paper. "Does not my pupil do me credit?"

"Very spirited," said Rosamond. "Where is she?"

"*He* is gone to fetch me his grandmother's umbrella. He is the little Gurth of these parts."

"Of whom you are making a Giotto?" asked Julius, thawing a little.

"Exactly; I found him drawing on a barn-door with such zeal and spirit, that I could not help offering him some lessons. Only see, does he not get on? I wish I could get him to the school of design."

"May I ask what becomes of his pigs?" demanded Julius.

"Don't you hear?" as sundry grunts and squeals of those eminently conversational animals were audible through the walls. "They are driven home to this rick-yard, so here I meet the boy."

"Who is he?" asked the Rector.

"I only know that he answers to the name of Joe. And here he comes!" as a boy about ten years old

came lumbering up in big boots, with a heavy plaid shawl on one arm, and an immense green umbrella in the other.

"Thank you, Joe. Make your bow to the lady and gentleman."

This was a pull of the flaxen forelock, for Joe was a slender, pretty, fair boy, of that delicately complexioned English type which is not roughened till after many years of exposure.

"That's right, my man," said Julius kindly. "What is your name?"

"Please, Sir, Joshua Reynolds."

"Instinct," whispered Rosamond.

"Or influence of a name," returned Miss Vivian.

"Are you one of Dan Reynolds's boys, or Tim's?" proceeded Julius.

"No, I bides with Granny."

Julius made no further attempt at disentangling the pedigree, but inquired about his employments. Did he go to school?

"When there ain't nothing to be done."

"And what can be done by such a mite?" asked Rosamond.

"Tell the lady," said the Rector, "what work can you do?"

"Bird starving."

"Well!"

"And stoon-picking, and cow-herding, and odd jobs up at Farmer Light's; but they won't take I on for a

carter-boy not yet, 'cause I beant not so lusty as some on 'em."

"Have you learnt to read?"

"Oh yes, very nicely," interposed Miss Vivian.

"Did you teach him?" said Rosamond.

"No! He could read well before I came to the place. I have only been at home six weeks, you know, and I did not know I was poaching on your manor," she added, *sotto voce*, to Julius, who could not but answer with warm thanks.

It was discovered that the rain had set in for the night, and an amicable contest ensued between the ladies as to shawl and umbrella, each declaring her dress unspoilable, till it ended in Eleonora's having the shawl, and both agreeing to share the umbrella as far as the Sirenwood lodge.

However, the umbrella refused to open, and had to be given to the boy, who set his teeth into an extraordinary grin, and so dealt with the brazen gear as to expand a magnificent green vault, with a lesser leathern arctic zone round the pole; but when he had handed it to Miss Vivian, and she had linked her arm in Lady Rosamond's, it proved too mighty for her, tugged like a restive horse, and would fairly have run away with her, but for Rosamond's holding her fast.

"Lost!" they cried. "Two ladies carried away by an umbrella!"

"Here, Julius, no one can grapple with it but you," called Rosamond.

"I really think it's alive!" panted Eleonora, drawn up to her tip-toes before she could hand it to Julius, who, with both clinging to his arm, conducted them at last to the lodge, where Julius could only come in as far as it would let him, since it could neither be let down nor left to itself to fly to unknown regions.

A keeper with a more manageable article undertook to convey Miss Vivian home across the park; and with a pleasant farewell, husband and wife plodded their way home, along paths the mud of which could not be seen, only heard and felt; and when Rosamond, in the light of the hall, discovered the extent of the splashes, she had to leave Julius still contending with the umbrella; and when, in spite of the united efforts of the butler and footman, it still refused to come down, it was consigned to an empty coach-house, with orders that little Joe should have a shilling to bring it down and fetch it home in the morning!

CHAPTER IV.

SHADES IN SUNSHINE.

" My friends would be angered,
My minnie be mad."
Scots Song.

"WHOM do you think we met, Mother?" said Julius, coming into her room, so soon as he had made his evening toilette, and finding there only his two younger brothers. "No other than Miss Vivian."

"Ah! then," broke in Charlie, "you saw what Jenkins calls the perfect picture of a woman."

"She is very handsome," soberly returned Julius. "Rose is quite delighted with her. Do you know anything of her?"

"Jenny Bowater was very fond of poor Emily," rejoined the mother. "I believe that she had a very good governess, but I wish she were in better hands now."

"I cannot think why there should be a universal prejudice for the sake of one early offence!" exclaimed Frank.

"Oh indeed!" said Julius, amazed at such a tone to his mother.

"I only meant—Mother, I beg your pardon—but you are only going by hearsay," answered Frank, in some confusion.

"Then you have not seen her?" said Julius.

"I! I'm the last person she is likely to seek, if you mean Camilla."

"She inquired a great deal after you, Mother," interposed Frank, "and said she longed to call, only she did not know if you could see her. I do hope you will, when she calls on Cecil. I am sure you would think differently. Promise me, Mother!"

"If she asks for me, I will, my boy," said Mrs. Poynsett; "but let me look! You aren't dressed for dinner! What will Mistress Cecil say to you! Ah! it is time you had ladies about the house again."

The two youths retreated; and Julius remained, looking anxiously and expressively at his mother.

"I am afraid so," she said; "but I had almost rather he were honestly smitten with the young one than that he believed in Camilla."

"I should think no one could long do that," said Julius.

"I don't know. He met them when he was nursing that poor young Scotsman at Rockpier, and got fascinated. He has never been quite the same since that time!" said the mother anxiously. "I don't

blame him, poor fellow!" she added eagerly, "or mean that he has been a bit less satisfactory—oh no! Indeed, it may be my fault for expressing my objection too plainly; he has always been reserved with me since, and I never lost the confidence of one of my boys before!"

That Julius knew full well, for he—as the next eldest at home—had been the recipient of all his mother's perplexities at the time of Raymond's courtship. Mrs. Poynsett had not been a woman of intimate female friends. Her sons had served the purpose, and this was perhaps one great element in her almost unbounded influence with them. Julius was deeply concerned to see her eyes glistening with tears as she spoke of the cloud that had risen between her and Frank.

"There is great hope that this younger one may be worthy," he said. "She has had a very different bringing up from her sister, and I did not tell you what I found her doing. She was teaching a little pig-herd boy to draw."

"Ah! I heard Lady Tyrrell was taking to the education of the people line."

"I want to know who the boy is," said Julius. "He called himself Reynolds, and said he lived with Granny, but was not a son of Daniel's or Timothy's. He seemed about ten years old.

"Reynolds? Then I know who he must be. Don't you remember a pretty-looking girl we had in the

nursery in Charlie's time? His 'Fan-fan,' he used to call her."

"Ah, yes, I remember; she was a Reynolds, for both the little boys could be excited to fury if we assumed that she was a fox. You don't mean that she went wrong?"

"Not till after she had left us, and seemed to be doing well in another place; but unfortunately she was allowed to have a holiday in the race week, and a day at the course seems to have done the mischief. Susan can tell you all about it, if you want to know. She was as broken-hearted as if Fanny had been her own child—much more than the old mother herself, I fear."

"What has become of the girl?"

"Gone from bad to worse. Alas! I heard a report that she had been seen with some of the people who appear on the race-course with those gambling shooting-galleries, or something of that sort."

"Ah! those miserable races! They are the bane of the country. I wish no one would go near them."

"They are a very pleasant county gathering."

"To you, Mother, and such as you; but you could have your county meeting without doing quite so much harm. If Raymond would only withdraw his subscription."

"It would be as much as his seat is worth! Those races are the one great event of Wilsbro' and Backs-

worth, the harvest of all the tradespeople. Besides, you know what is said of their expedience as far as horses are concerned."

"I would sacrifice the breed of horses to prevent the evils," said Julius.

"*You* would, but— My boy, I suppose this is the right view for a clergyman, but it will never do to force it here. You will lose all influence if you are overstrained."

"Was St. Chrysostom overstrained about the hippodrome?" said Julius thoughtfully.

Mrs. Poynsett looked at him as he leant upon the chimney-piece. Here was another son gone, in a different way, beyond her reach. She had seen comparatively little of him since his University days; and though always a good and conscientious person, there had been nothing to draw her out of secular modes of thought; nor had she any connection with the clerical world, so that she had not, as it were, gone along with the tone of mind that she had perceived in him.

He did not return to the subject, and they were soon joined by his elder brother. At the first opportunity after dinner, Frank got Rosamond up into a corner with a would-be indifferent "So you met Miss Vivian. What did you think of her?"

Rosamond's intuition saw what she was required to think, and being experienced in raving brothers, she praised the fine face and figure so as to find the way to his heart.

"I am so glad you met her in that way. Even Julius must be convinced. Was not he delighted?"

"I think she grew upon him."

"And now neither of you will be warped. It is so very strange in my mother, generally the kindest, most open-hearted woman in the world, to distrust and bear a grudge against them all for the son's dissipation—just as if that affected the ladies of a family!"

"I did not think it was entirely on his account," said Rosamond.

"Old stories of flirtation!" said Frank scornfully; "but what are they to be cast up against a woman in her widowhood? It is so utterly unlike Mother, I can't understand it."

"Would not the natural conclusion be that she knew more, and had her reasons?"

"I tell you, Rosamond, I know them infinitely better than she does. She never saw them since Lady Tyrrell's marriage, when Eleonora was a mere child; now I saw a great deal of them at Rockpier last year. There was poor Jamie Armstrong sent down to spend the winter on the south coast; and as none of his own people could be with him, we—his Oxford friends, I mean—took turns to come to him; and as I had just gone up for my degree, I had the most time. The Vivians had been living there ever since they went on poor Emily's account. They did not like to leave the place where she died, you see;

and Lady Tyrrell had joined them after her husband's death. Such a pleasant house! no regular gaieties, of course, but a few friends in a quiet way—music and charades, and so forth. Everyone knew everybody there; not a bit of our stiff county ways, but meeting all day long in the most sociable manner."

"Oh yes, I know the style of place."

"One gets better acquainted in a week than one does in seven years in a place like this," proceeded Frank. "And you may tell Julius to ask any of the clerics if Lenore was not a perfect darling with the Vicar and his wife, and her sister too; and Rockpier is a regular tip-top place for Church, you know. I'm sure it was enough to make a fellow good for life, just to see Eleonora walking up the aisle with that sweet face of hers, looking more like heaven than earth."

Rosamond made reply enough to set him off again. "Lady Tyrrell would have been content to stay there for ever, she told me, but she thought it too confined a range for Eleonora; there was no formation of character, though I don't see how it could have formed better; but Lady Tyrrell is a thoroughly careful motherly sister, and thought it right she should see a little of the world. So they broke up from Rockpier, and spent a year abroad; and now Lady Tyrrell is making great sacrifices to enable her father to come and live at home again. I must say it would be more neighbourly to welcome them a little more kindly!"

"I should think such agreeable people were sure to win their way."

"Ah! you don't know how impervious our style of old squire and squiress can be! If even Mother is not superior to the old prejudice, who will be? And it is *very* hard on a fellow; for three parts of my time is taken up by this eternal cramming—I should have no heart for it but for her—and I can't be going over to Sirenwood as I used to go to Rockpier, while my mother vexes herself about it, in her state. If she were up and about I should not mind, or she would know better; but what can they—Lenore, I mean—think of me, but that I am as bad as the rest?"

"Do you mean that anything has passed between you?"

"No, not with Lenore. Her sister spoke to me, and said it was not right when she had seen nothing but Rockpier; but she as good as promised to stand my friend. And when I get to the office, in two years, I shall have quite enough to begin upon, with what my mother allows us."

"Then you hope she will wait for that?"

"I feel sure of it—that is, if she is not annoyed by this abominable usage from my family. Oh! Rosamond, you will help us when you get into your own house, and you will get Julius to see it in a proper light. Mother trusts to him almost as much as to Raymond; but it is our misfortune to be so much younger that she can't believe us grown up."

"O Frank," said Charlie, coming in, "here's Price come up about the puppies.—What, Rosamond, has he got hold of you? What a blessing for me! but I pity you."

Frank and Charlie went off together; and Julius was in the act of begging Cecil to illuminate a notice of the services, to be framed and put into the church porch, when Raymond came in from the other room to make up a whist-table for his mother. Rosamond gladly responded; but there was a slight accent of contempt in Cecil's voice, as she replied, "I never played a game at cards in my life."

"They are a great resource to my mother," said Raymond. "Anne, you are too tired to play?—No, Julius, the pack is not there; look in the drawer of the chiffonière."

Julius handed the list he had been jotting down to Cecil, and followed his brother, with his hands full of cards, unconscious of the expression of dismay, almost horror, with which Anne was gazing after him.

"Oh! let us be resolute!" she cried, as soon as the door was shut. "Do not let us touch the evil thing!"

"Cards?" said Cecil. "If Mrs. Poynsett cannot be amused without them, I suppose we shall have to learn. I always heard she was such an intellectual woman."

"But we ought to resist sin, however painful it may be," said Anne, gathering strength; "nay, even if a minister sets the example of defection."

"You think it wicked," said Cecil. "Oh no, it is stupid and silly, and an absurd waste of time, but no more."

"Yes, it is," said Anne. "Cards are the bane of thousands."

"Oh yes, gambling and all that; but to play in the evening to amuse an invalid can have no harm in it."

"An invalid and aged woman ought to have her mind set upon better things," said Anne. "I shall not withdraw my testimony, and I hope you will not."

"I don't know," said Cecil. "You see I am expected to attend to Mrs. Poynsett; and I have seen whist at Dunstone when any dull old person came there. What a troublesome crooked hand Julius writes—just like Greek! What's all this? So many services—four on Sunday, two every day, three on Wednesdays and Fridays! We never had anything like this at Dunstone."

"It is very superstitious," said Anne.

"Very superfluous, I should say," amended Cecil. "I am sure my father would consent to nothing of the kind. I shall speak to Raymond about it."

"Yes," said Anne; "it does seem terrible that a minister should try to make up for worldly amusements by a quantity of vain ceremonies."

"I wish you would not call him a minister, it sounds like a dissenter."

"I think ministers their best name, except pastors."

"Both are horrid alike," said Cecil. "I shall teach

all the people to call Julius the Rector. That's better than Mr. Charnock—what Raymond ought to be."

Anne was struck dumb at this fearful display of worldliness; and Cecil betook herself to the piano, but the moment her husband appeared she showed him the list.

"He has cut out plenty of work," said Raymond, "but three of them must want a field for their energies."

"It is preposterous. I want you to speak to him about it."

"You are not expected to go to them all," Raymond made answer.

"Then there's no sense in having them," responded Cecil. "Evening services are very bad for the people, bringing them out late. You ought to tell him so."

"He is Rector, and I am not," said Raymond.

"Mr. Venn did nothing without Papa's consent," exclaimed the lady.

"My dear Cecil, don't let your loyalty make a Harry the Eighth of your father," said Raymond; "the clergyman ought to be a free agent."

"You don't approve?"

"I don't approve or disapprove. It is not a matter I know anything about."

"But I assure you it has been all thought over at Dunstone."

"Come, my mother wants to go to bed, and you are keeping her waiting."

Cecil was silenced for the moment, but not daunted; for was it not the foremost duty of the lady of the manor to keep the clergyman in order, more especially when he was her own husband's younger brother? so she met her brother-in-law with "Julius, when I undertook that notice, I had no notion you were going to have so many services."

"Is there more than you have time to paint? Then Bindon can do it, or Jenny Bowater."

"No! it is not time or trouble; but I do not think such a number of services desirable."

"Indeed!" said he, looking amused.

"Yes. An over number of services frequented by no one only brings the Church into contempt. I heard Papa say so. We only had regular Sunday and Saint's Day services, and I am sure Dunstone was quite as religious a place as there is any need to be."

"I am glad to hear it," said Julius, an odd look flickering about his face; "but as I am afraid Compton is not as religious a place as there is need to be, I must try, by your leave, all means of making it so. Good-night."

He was gone, and Cecil was not sure that he had not presumed to laugh at her.

CHAPTER V.

A SUNDAY OF EXCITEMENT.

"Strangers in court do take her for the queen."
Shakespeare.

THE first Sunday of Julius Charnock's ministry was spent in an unexpected manner. In the darkness of the autumn morning there was a knock at the door, and a low hurried call in Anne's voice at the bedroom door, "Rosamond! Julius, pray look out! Isn't there a great fire somewhere?"

"Fire! Here?" cried Rosamond, springing up.

"No, not here. A great way off. You could beat it back."

Rosamond had by this time rushed to the window which looked out the wrong way, found her dressing-gown, and scrambled into it in the dark ere joining Anne in the gallery, from the end window of which the lurid light in the sky, with an occasional flame leaping up, was plainly visible. When Julius joined them he declared it to be at Willansborough, and set off to call up the coachman and despatch the fire-

engine, his wife calling after him to send for the soldiers at Backsworth.

Frank and Charlie came rushing down in gratified excitement, declaring that it was tremendous—the church at least—and exulting in the attainment of their life-long ambition, the riding out on the fire-engine. Servants bustled about, exclaiming, tramping, or whisking, on the stairs; and Raymond presently appeared to ask whether his mother were ill, and, when re-assured on that score, hurrying to ascertain whether she were alarmed, before he started for the scene of action.

"Let me come and stay with her," said Rosamond, a striking figure, in a scarlet dressing-gown, with a thick plait of black hair hanging down to her waist on either side.

"Thank you, it will be very kind," said Raymond, running down before her, and meeting Susan waddling out in a fringe of curl-papers, for some mysterious instinct or echo had conveyed to her and her mistress that there was fire somewhere—perhaps at home. Mrs. Poynsett was not a nervous woman, and from the time she saw her eldest son come in all fright was over, and she could have borne to hear that the house over her head was burning, in the perfect trust that he would save her from all peril; nor had he any difficulty in committing her to Rosamond, when he hurried away to finish dressing and repair to the spot.

Nothing could be seen from her room, but the little ante-room between it and the drawing-room had an excellent view, as the ground fell away from it, and there was an opening among the trees.

"We must get you there!" exclaimed Rosamond, in her excitement, helping her into some garments, and then running out as she heard a step—"Here, Julius, help me;" and without more ado, the mother was transported between them to the broad low couch under the window, and there bestowed in a nest of pillows, shawls, and rugs, that seemed to grow up under Rosamond's touch.

Then following Julius out into the hall as he met his brother, Rosamond clung to him, entreating, "Please, please don't run into any dangerous places."

"Never fear, dearest; I am not likely."

"Don't let him, pray!" she said, turning to Raymond. "Make him remember how blind he is."

"I'll take good care of him, Rosamond," said the elder brother kindly; "I'm used to it."

"And send for the —th," she added. "There is nothing like soldiers at a fire."

"The glare must have given notice," said Julius, "but we'll send if needful. Let go, you foolish girl; I'm not leading a forlorn hope."

Did Raymond, as he mounted his horse, turning from the contact of the white and black heads, admire the reasonableness of the Cecil who had never shown any fears for his safety, nor any tendency to run

about the passages in her *robe de chambre,* though she was now dressing with all speed ?

The women-folk had to depend on their own eyes for intelligence, for every male, not only of the household but of the village, between the ages of five and seventy, started for Wilsbro', and a good many females followed their example, including the cook and her suite.

However, Susan remained, to find her mistress flown, and in her fright, give Lady Rosamond as round a scolding as if she had been Charlie, for her rashness in attempting a transit, which Dr. Hayter had pronounced to be as much as her mistress's life was worth. Having thus relieved her mind, and finding that Mrs. Poynsett was really very comfortable, or else too eager and anxious to find out if she was not, the good woman applied herself to the making of coffee.

Anne and Cecil had found their way to the leads, and were thence summoned to partake of this hasty meal, after which they proposed going to look from the brow of the hill; and Mrs. Poynsett insisted that Rosamond should not stay behind on her account; and, glad to appease the restlessness of anxiety, out went the ladies, to find the best view of the town, —usually a white object in the distance, but now blurred by smoke thick and black in the daylight, and now and then reddened by bursts of flame.

Anne had been re-assured as to the need of beating

out the fire and trampling down a place to isolate it, as in the bush-fires of her experience; and Rosamond related the achievements of the regiment in quenching many a conflagration in inflammable colonial cities.

It occurred to her that the best place whence to see it was the tower of the church, which, placed upon a little knoll, was standing out in full relief against the lurid light. She found the key at the sexton's, and led the way up the broken stone stair to the trap-door, where they emerged on the leads, and, in spite of the cold wind and furious flapping of the flag above their heads, stood absorbed in the interest of the sight.

There was a black mass in the open space, whence rose fitful clouds of smoke, the remnants of the fire, which had there done its worst; and beyond was a smoky undefined outline, with tongues of flame darting up, then volumes of dense white smoke, denoting a rush of water from the engines. Black beings flitted about like ants round a disturbed nest; Rosamond hoped she detected some scarlet among them, and Cecil lamented over not having brought her opera-glass. Even without this, it was possible to make out two long lines of men between the fire and the river, and at times they fancied they heard the shouting, but the wind generally carried it away. The cold was bitter, and they had to hold together and keep a tight grip upon their garments against the gusts that seemed to rock the tower; but they could not bear to

turn away, though the clock beneath pealed out hour after hour; for still, as the flames were subdued in one place they broke out in another; but gradually smoke became predominant, and then grew thinner, and as some of the black specks began to straggle into the road as if returning to Compton, the desire to hear became more pressing than that to see, and the three ladies began to decend—a slow and weary process, cutting them off from the view, and lasting so long, that the road was no longer deserted when they finally emerged into the churchyard.

Young Mr. Bowater, grimed, dusty, hatless, and his hair on end, and Rollo following with his feathery tail singed, hurried up at once. "I'm not fit to touch Lady Rosamond," as he showed a black hand, and bowed to the others.

"Where's Ju—where's my husband?" exclaimed Rosamond.

"Just behind, riding home with Raymond and the rest of them. Wasn't it a magnificent flare-up? But there was no loss of life; and this dog was of as much use as two men—carried whatever I told him."

"Good old man! You've suffered too!" said Rosamond. "Pah! you're like a singed horse; but never mind, you're a hero."

"And where is Mr. Charnock Poynsett?" said Cecil, retreating from the dog, which her sisters-in-law were vehimenently patting.

"He was arranging with the Mayor. Church,

paper-mills, and town-hall got the worst of it. It was well he came down; old Briggs, the mayor, lost his head, and Fuller never had one. Everyone gave contrary orders till he came down, and then, didn't we work!"

The Curate stretched his stalwart limbs, as if they were becoming sensible of the strain they had undergone.

"Did you say the church was burnt?" asked Cecil.

"Yes; and a very good thing too! Hideous place, where you couldn't do right if you died for it! The fire began there—stoves, no doubt—and there it would have stopped if anyone had had any sense; but there they would run and gape, and the more I tried to get them to form a chain and drench the warehouses, the more they wouldn't do it. And when the flame once got hold of the paper—did you see it?—it was not a thing to forget. I verily believe the whole town would have gone if the Charnocks hadn't come and got a little discipline into the asses. It was just life and death work, fighting the fire to hinder it from getting across Water Lane, and then it would have been all up with High Street. The tongues broke out like live things ready to lick up everything; and it was like killing dragons to go at them with the hose and buckets. I declare my arms are fit to drop out of their sockets. And the Rector devoted himself to carrying out bed-ridden old women. I forgot to tell you Lady Rosamond, he has broken his—

There now, I never meant to frighten you—broken his spectacles."

"You did it on purpose," she said, laughing at her own start.

"No, indeed, I did not."

"And is it quite out now?"

"Yes; when the Backsworth engines and the soldiers came up, it was like the Prussians at Waterloo."

"Oh, then it was done," said Rosamond. "Take care! my grandfather was in the Light Division."

"And my uncle in the Guards," said the Curate. But before the Waterloo controversy could be pursued, four or five figures on horseback came round the knoll, and Raymond and Julius sprang off their horses, introducing the three officers who followed their example.

One was Rosamond's old acquaintance, the Colonel, a friend of her father; but she had little attention to spare for them till she had surveyed her husband, who looked nothing worse than exceedingly dusty, and at fault without his spectacles.

Enquiries were made for Frank and Charlie. They were walking home. They had worked gallantly. The flames were extinguished, but the engines must go on playing on them for some time longer. No lives lost, and very few casualties, but the paper-mills were entirely destroyed, and about twenty tenements, so that great distress was to be apprehended.

Such intelligence was being communicated as the party stood together in a group, when there was a light tinkling of bells, and two ladies in a light open carriage, drawn by two spirited ponies, dashed round the knoll; and at the moment something must have gone wrong with them, for there was a start, a pull, a call of "Raymond! Raymond!"

Throwing his bridle to Herbert Bowater, he sprang to the horses' heads.

"Mr. Poynsett! Thank you! I beg your pardon," said the lady, recovering herself; and Rosamond instantly perceived that she must be Lady Tyrrell, for she was young-looking, very handsome, and in slight mourning; and her companion was Miss Vivian. Julius, holding his surviving glass to his eye, likewise stepped forward. "Thank you, it was so stupid," the lady ran on. "Is not there something wrong with the traces? I don't know how they got themselves harnessed, but there was no keeping at home."

"I think all is right," said Raymond, gravely, making the examination over to a servant. "Let me introduce my wife, Lady Tyrrell."

The lady held out her hand. "I hope we shall be excellent neighbours.—My sister.—You remember little Lena," she added to the brothers. "She stole a march on us, I find. I heard of your encounter on Friday. It was too bad of you not to come in and let us send you home; I hope you did not get very wet, Lady Rosamond.—Ah! Mr. Strangeways, I did

not know you were there," she proceeded, as the youngest of the officers accosted her; "come over and see us. You're better provided now; but come to luncheon any day. I am sure to be at home at half-past one; and I want so much to hear of your mother and sisters." And with a universal bow and smile she flourished her whip, her ponies jangled their bells, and the ladies vanished.

"Stunning pair that!" was young Strangeways' exclamation.

"Most beautiful!" murmured Cecil, in a low voice, as if she was quite dazzled. "You never said she was like that," she added reproachfully to Julius.

"Our encounter was in the dark," he answered.

"Oh, I did not mean the young one, but Lady Tyrrell. She is just like a gem we saw at Firenze—which was it?"

"Where?" said Raymond, bewildered.

"Firenze—Florence," she said, deigning to translate; and finding her own reply. "Ah yes, the Medusa!" then, as more than one exclaimed in indignant dismay, she said, "No, not the Gorgon, but the beautiful winged head, with only two serpents on the brow and one coiled round the neck, and the pensive melancholy face."

"I know," said Julius, shortly; while the other gentlemen entered into an argument, some defending the beauty of the younger sister, some of the elder; and it lasted till they entered the park, where all

were glad to partake of their well-earned meal, most of the gentlemen having been at work since dawn without sustenance, except a pull at the beer served out to the firemen.

Cecil was not at all shy, and was pleased to take her place as representative lady of the house; but somehow, though everyone was civil and attentive to her, she found herself effaced by the more full-blown Rosamond, accustomed to the same world as the guests; and she could not help feeling the same sense of depression as when she had to yield the head of her father's table to her step-mother.

Nor could she have that going to church for the first time in state with her bridegroom she had professed to dread, but had really anticipated with complacency; for though Julius had bidden the bells to be rung for afternoon service, Raymond was obliged to go back to Wilsbro' to make arrangements for the burnt-out families, and she had to go as lonely as Anne herself.

Lady Tyrrell and her sister were both at Compton Church, and overtook the three sisters-in-law as they were waiting to be joined by the Rector.

"We shall have to take shelter with you," said Lady Tyrrell, "poor burnt-out beings that we are."

"Do you belong to Wilsbro'?" said Rosamond.

"Yes; St. Nicholas is an immense straggling parish, going four miles along the river. I don't know how we shall ever be able to go back again to poor old

Mr. Fuller. You'll never get rid of us from Compton."

"I suppose they will set about re-building the church at once," said Cecil. "Of course they will form a committee, and put my husband on it."

"In the chair, no doubt," said Lady Tyrrell, in a tone that sounded to Rosamond sarcastic, but which evidently gratified Cecil. "But we will have a committee of our own, and you will have to preside, and patronize our bazaar. Of course you know all about them."

"Oh yes!" said Cecil, eagerly. "We have one every year for the Infirmary, only my father did not approve of my selling at a stall."

"Ah! quite right then, but you are a married woman now, and that is quite a different thing. The stall of the three brides. What an attraction! I shall come and talk about it when I make my call in full form! Good-bye again."

Cecil's balance was more than restored by this entire recognition to be prime lady-patroness of everything. To add to her satisfaction, when her husband came home to dinner, bringing with him both the curates, she found there was to be a meeting on Tuesday in the Assembly-room, of both sexes, to consider of the relief of the work-people, and that he would be glad to take her to it. Moreover as it was to be strictly local, Rosamond was not needed there, though Raymond was not equally clear as to the

Rector, since he believed that the St. Nicholas parishioners meant to ask the loan of Compton Poynsett Church for one service on a Sunday.

"Then I shall keep out of the way," said Julius. "I do not want to have the request made to me in public."

"You do not mean to refuse?" said Cecil, with a sort of self-identification with her constituents.

"The people are willing to attend as many of our services as they like; but there is no hour that I could give the church up to Mr. Fuller on a Sunday."

"Nor would the use of St. Nicholas be very edifying for our people," added Mr. Bindon.

His junior clenched it by saying with a laugh, "I should think not! Fancy old Fuller's rusty black gown up in our pulpit!"

"I rejoice to say that is burnt," rejoined Mr. Bindon.

"What bet will you take that a new one will be the first thing subscribed for?" said the Deacon, bringing a certain grave look on the faces of both the elder clergy, and a horror-stricken one upon Anne's; while Cecil pronounced her inevitable dictum, that at Dunstone Mr. Venn always preached in a gown, and "we" should never let him think of anything nonsensical.

Rosamond was provoked into a display of her solitary bit of ecclesiastical knowledge—"A friar's gown, the most Popish vestment in the Church."

Cecil, thoroughly angered, flushed up to the eyes

and bit her lips, unable to find a reply, while all the gentlemen laughed. Frank asked if it were really so, and Mr. Bindon made the well-known explanation that the Geneva gown was neither more nor less than the monk's frock.

"I shall write and ask Mr. Venn," gasped Cecil; but her husband stifled the sound by saying, "I saw little Pettitt, Julius, this afternoon, overwhelmed with gratitude to you for all the care you took of his old mother, and all his waxen busts."

"Ah! by-the-bye!" said Charlie, "I did meet the Rector staggering out, with the fascinating lady with the long eyelashes in one arm, and the moustached hero in the other."

"There was no pacifying the old lady without," said Julius. "I had just coaxed her to the door, when she fell to wringing her hands. Ah! those lovely models, that were worth thirty shillings each, with natural hair—that they should be destroyed! If the heat or the water did but come near them, Adolphus would never get over it. I could only pacify her by promising to go back for these idols of his heart as soon as she was safe; and after all, I had to dash at them through the glass, and that was the end of my spectacles."

"Where was Pettitt himself?"

"Well employed, poor little fellow, saving the people in those three cottages of his. No one supposed his shop in danger, but the fire took a sudden

freak and came down Long Street; and though the house is standing, it had to be emptied and deluged with water to save it. I never knew Pettitt had a mother till I found her mounting guard, like one distracted, over her son's bottles of perfumery."

"And dyes?" murmured Raymond under his breath; but Frank caught the sound, and said, "Ah, Julius! don't I remember his inveigling you into coming out with scarlet hair?"

"I don't think I've seen him since," said Julius, laughing. "I believe he couldn't resist such an opportunity of practising his art. And for my part, I must say for myself, that it was in our first holidays, and Raymond and Miles had been black and blue the whole half-year from having fought my battles whenever I was called either 'Bunny' or 'Grandfather.' So when he assured me he could turn my hair to as sweet a raven-black as Master Poynsett's, I thought it would be pleasing to all, forgetting that he could not dye my eyes, and that their effect would have been some degrees more comical."

"For shame, Julius!" said Rosamond. "Don't you know that one afternoon, when Nora had cried for forty minutes over her sum, she declared that she wanted to make her eyes as beautiful as Mr. Charnock's. Well, what was the effect?"

"Startling," said Raymond. "He came down in shades of every kind of crimson and scarlet. A fearful object, with his pink-and-white face glowing under it."

"And what I had to undergo from Susan!" added Julius. "She washed me, and soaped me, and rubbed me, till I felt as if all the threshing-machines in the county were about my head, lecturing me all the time on the profanity of flying against Scripture by trying to alter one's hair from what Providence had made it. Nothing would do; her soap only turned it into shades of lemon and primrose. I was fain to let her shave my head as if I had a brain fever; and I was so horribly ashamed for years after, that I don't think I have set foot in Long Street since till to-day."

"Pettitt is a queer little fellow," said Herbert. "The most truculent little Radical to hear him talk, and yet staunch in his votes, for he can't go against those whose hair he has cut off from time immemorial."

"I hope he has not lost much," said Julius.

"His tenements are down, but they were insured; and as to his stock, he says he owes its safety entirely to you, Julius. I think he would present you with both his models as a testimonial, if you could only take them," said Raymond.

Cecil had neither spoken nor laughed through all this. She was nursing her wrath; and after marching out of the dining-room, lay in wait to intercept her husband, and when she had claimed his attention, began, "Rosamond ought not to be allowed to say such things."

"What things?"

"Speaking in that improper way about a gown."

"She seems to have said what was the fact."

"It can't be! It is preposterous! I never heard it before."

"Nor I; but Bindon evidently is up in those matters."

"It was only to support Rosamond; and I am quite sure she said it out of mere opposition to me. You ought to speak to Julius."

"About what?" said Raymond.

"Her laughing whenever I mention Dunstone, and tell them the proper way of doing things."

"There may be different opinions about the proper way of doing things." Then as she opened her eyes in wonder and rebuke, he continued, in his elder-brotherly tone of kindness, "You know I told you already that you had better not interfere in matters concerning his church and parish."

"We always managed things at Dunstone."

Hang Dunstone! was with some difficulty suppressed; but in an extra gentle voice Raymond said, "Your father did what he thought his duty, but I do not think it mine, nor yours, to direct Julius in clerical matters. It can only lead to disputes, and I will not have them."

"It is Rosamond. I'm sure I don't dispute."

"Listen, Cecil!" he said. "I can see that your position may be trying, in these close quarters with a younger brother's wife with more age and rank than yourself."

"That is nothing. An Irish earl, and a Charnock of Dunstone!"

"Dunstone will be more respected if you keep it in the background," he said, holding in stronger words with great difficulty. "Once for all, you have your own place and duties, and Rosamond has hers. If you meddle in them, nothing but annoyance can come of it; and remember, I cannot be appealed to in questions between you and her. Julius and I have gone on these nine-and-twenty years without a cloud between us, and I'm sure you would not wish to bring one now."

Wherewith he left her bewildered. She did not perceive that he was too impartial for a lover, but she had a general sense that she had come into a rebellious world, where Dunstone and Dunstone's daughter were of no account, and her most cherished notions disputed. What was the Lady of the Manor to do but to superintend the church, parsonage, and parish generally? Not her duty? She had never heard of such a thing, nor did she credit it. Papa would come home, make these degenerate Charnocks hear reason, and set all to rights.

CHAPTER VI.

WEDDING VISITS.

YOUNG Mrs. Charnock Poynsett had plenty of elasticity, and her rebuffs were less present to her mind in the morning than to that of her husband, who had been really concerned to have to inflict an expostulation; and he was doubly kind, almost deferential, giving the admiration and attention he felt incumbent on him to the tasteful arrangements of her wedding presents in her own sitting-room.

"And this clock I am going to have in the drawing-room, and these Salviati glasses. Then, when I have moved out the piano, I shall put the sofa in its place, and my own little table, with my pretty Florentine ornaments."

Raymond again looked annoyed. "Have you spoken to my mother?" he said.

"No; she never goes there."

"Not now, but if ever she can bear any move it will be her first change, and I should not like to interfere with her arrangements."

"She could never have been a musician, to let the piano stand against the wall. I shall never be able to play."

"Perhaps that might be contrived," said Raymond, kindly. "*Here*, you know is your own domain, where you can do as you please."

"Yes; but I am expected to play in the evening. Look at all those things. I had kept the choicest for the drawing-room, and it is such a pity to hide them all up here."

Raymond felt for the mortification, and was unwilling to cross her again, so he said, "I will ask whether my mother would object to having the piano moved."

"This morning?"

"After eleven o'clock—I never disturb her sooner; but you shall hear before I go to Backsworth."

"An hour lost," thought Cecil; but she was too well bred to grumble, and she had her great work to carry on of copying and illustrating her journal.

Mrs. Poynsett readily consented. "Oh yes, my dear, let her do whatever she likes. Don't let me be a bug-bear. A girl is never at home till she has had her will of the furniture. I think she will find that moving out the piano betrays the fading of the rest of the paper, but that is her affair. She is free to do just as she likes. I dare say the place does look antediluvian to young eyes."

So Raymond was the bearer of his mother's full

permission; and Cecil presided with great energy over the alterations, which she carried out by the aid of the younger servants, to the great disgust of their seniors. She expected the acclamations of her contemporaries; but it happened that the first of them to cross the room was Julius, on his way to his mother's room after luncheon, and he, having on a pair of make-shift glasses, till the right kind could be procured from London, was unprepared for obstacles in familiar regions, stumbled over an ottoman, and upset a table with the breakage of a vase.

He apologized, with much regret; but the younger brothers made an outcry. "What has come to the place? Here's the table all over everything!"

"And where are the bronzes?"

"And the humming-birds? Miles's birds, that he brought home after his first voyage."

"And the clock with the two jolly little Cupids. Don't you remember Miles and Will Bowater dressing them up for men-of-war's men? Mother could not bring herself to have them undressed for a year, and all the time the clock struck nohow!"

"This is an anatomical study instead of a clock," lamented Frank. "I say, Cecil, do you like your friends to sit in their bones, like Sydney Smith?"

"I never saw such a stupid old set of conservatives!" broke in Rosamond, feeling for Cecil's mortification. "In an unprejudiced eye the room looks infinitely better, quite revivified! You ought to be

much obliged to Cecil for letting you see all her beautiful things."

"Why don't you favour us with yours?" said Charlie.

"I know better! Mine aren't fit to wipe the shoes of Cecil's! When I get into the Rectory you'll see how hideous they are!" said Rosamond, with the merriest complacency. "Couvrepieds to set your teeth on edge, from the non-commissioned officers' wives; and the awfullest banner-screen you ever saw, worked by the drum-major's own hands, with Her Majesty's arms on one side, and the De Courcy ones on the other, and glass eyes like stuffed birds' to the lion and unicorn. We nearly expired from suppressed laughter under the presentation."

Then she went round, extorting from the lads admiration for Cecil's really beautiful properties, and winning gratitude for her own cordial praise, though it was not the artistic appreciation they deserved. Indeed, Cecil yielded to the general vote for the restoration of the humming-birds, allowing that, though she did not like stuffed birds in a drawing-room, she would not have banished them if she had known their history.

This lasted till Charlie spied a carriage coming up the drive, which could be seen a long way off, so that there was the opportunity for a general *sauve qui peut*. Cecil represented that Rosamond ought to stay and receive her bridal visits; but she was unpersuadable.

"Oh no! I leave all that for you! My time will come when I get into the Rectory. We are going in the dog-cart to the other end of the parish.—What's its name—Squattlesea Marsh, Julius?"

"Squattlesford!" said Charlie. "If Julius means to drive you, look out for your neck!"

"No, it's the other way, I'm going to drive Julius! —Come along, or we shall be caught!"

Cecil stood her ground, as did Anne, who was too weary and indifferent to retreat, and Frank, who had taken another view of the carriage as it came nearer.

"I must apologize for having brought nothing but my father's card," said Lady Tyrrell, entering with her sister, and shaking hands; "there's no such thing as dragging him out for a morning call."

"And Mr. Charnock Poynsett is not at home," replied Cecil. "He found so much county business waiting for him, that he had to go to Backsworth."

"It is the better opportunity for a little private caucus with you," returned Lady Tyrrell, "before the meeting to-morrow. I rather fancy the gentlemen have one of their own."

"Some are to dine here to-night," said Cecil.

"We ladies had better be prepared with our proposals," said Lady Tyrrell.

At the same time Frank drew near Miss Vivian with a large book, saying, "These are the photographs you wished to see."

He placed the book on the ottoman, and would thus have secured a sort of *tête-à-tête;* but Eleonora did not choose to leave Mrs. Miles Charnock out, and handed her each photograph in turn, but could only elicit a cold languid "Thank you." To Anne's untrained eye these triumphs of architecture were only so many dull representations of "Roman Catholic churches," and she would much rather have listened to the charitable plans of the other two ladies, for the houseless factory women of Wilsbro'.

The bazaar, Lady Tyrrell said, must be first started by the Member's wife; and there should be an innermost committee, of not more than three, to dispose of stalls and make arrangements.

"You must be one," said Cecil. "I know no one yet."

"You will, long before it comes off. In fact, I am as great a stranger as yourself. Ah! there's an opportunity!" as the bell pealed. "The Bowaters, very likely; I saw their Noah's ark as I passed the Poynsett Arms, with the horses taken out. I wonder how many are coming—worthy folks!"

Which evidently meant insufferable bores.

"Is there not a daughter?" asked Cecil.

"You need not use the singular, though, by-the-by, most of them are married."

"Oh, pray stay!" entreated Cecil, as there were signs of leave-taking.

"I should do you no good. You'll soon learn that I am a sort of Loki among the Asagötter."

Cecil laughed, but had time to resume her somewhat prim dignity before the lengthened disembarkation was over, and after all, produced only four persons; but then none were small—Mrs. Bowater was a harsh matron, Mr. Bowater a big comely squire, the daughters both tall, one with an honest open face much like Herbert's, only with rather less youth and more intelligence, the other a bright dark glowing gypsy-faced young girl.

Eleonora Vivian, hitherto gravely stiff and reserved, to poor Frank's evident chagrin, at once flashed into animation, and met the elder Miss Bowater with outstretched hands, receiving a warm kiss. At the same time Mr. Bowater despatched Frank to see whether his mother could admit a visitor; and Lady Tyrrell observed, "Ah! I was about to make the same petition; but I will cede to older friends, for so I suppose I must call you, Mr. Bowater—though my acquaintance is of long standing enough!"

And she put on a most charming smile, which Mr. Bowater received with something inarticulate that might be regarded as a polite form of "fudge," which made Cecil think him a horribly rude old man, and evidently discomposed his wife very much.

Frank brought back his mother's welcome to the Squire; but by this time Eleonora and Miss Bowater had drawn together into a window, in so close and earnest a conversation that he could not break into it, and with almost visible reluctance began to talk to

the younger sister, who on her side was desirous of joining in the bazaar discussion, which had been started again in full force; until there was a fresh influx of visitors, when Lady Tyrrell decidedly took leave with her sister, and Frank escorted them to their carriage, and returned no more.

In the new shuffling of partners the elder Miss Bowater found herself close to Anne, and at once inquired warmly for Miles, with knowledge and interest in naval affairs derived from a sailor brother, Miles's chief friend and mess-mate in his training and earlier voyages. There was something in Joanna Bowater's manner that always unlocked hearts, and Anne was soon speaking without her fence of repellent stiffness and reserve. Certainly Miles was loved by his mother and brothers more than he could be by an old play-fellow and sisterly friend, and yet there was something in Joanna's tone that gave Anne a sense of fellow-feeling, as if she had met a countrywoman in this land of strangers; and she even told how Miles had thought it right to send her home, thinking that she might be a comfort to his mother. "And not knowing all that was going to happen!" said poor Anne, with an irrepressible sigh, both for her own blighted hopes, and for the whirl into which her sore heart had fallen.

"I think you will be," said Joanna, brightly; "though it must be strange coming on so many. Dear Mrs. Poynsett is so kind!"

"Yes," said Anne, coldly.

"Ah! you don't know her yet. And Lady Rosamond! She is delightful!"

"Have you seen her?"

"We met them just now in the village, but my brother is enchanted. And do you know what was Julius's first introduction to her? It was at a great school-feast, where they had the regimental children as well as the town ones. A poor little boy went off in an epileptic fit, and Julius found her holding him, with her own hand in his mouth to hinder the locking of the teeth. He said her fingers were bitten almost to the bone, but she made quite light of it."

"That was nice!" said Anne; but then, with a startled glance, and in an undertone, she added, "Are they Christians?"

Joanna Bowater paused for a moment between dismay and desire for consideration, and in that moment her father called to her, "Jenny, do you remember the dimensions of those cottages in Queckett's Lane?" and she had to come and serve for his memory, while he was indoctrinating a younger squire with the duties of a landlord.

Meanwhile Mrs. Bowater was, for the tenth time, consulting her old friend upon Mrs. Hornblower's capabilities of taking care of Herbert, and betraying a little disappointment that his first sermon had not yet been heard; and when his voice was complimented, she hoped Julius would spare it—too much

exertion could not be good for so young a man, and though dear Herbert looked so strong, no one would believe how much sleep he required. Then she observed, "We found Camilla Vivian —Lady Tyrrell I mean—calling. Have you seen her?"

"No."

"Well, she really seems improved!"

"Mr. Bowater has been telling me she is handsomer than ever!"

"Oh yes! That's all gentlemen think of; but I meant in other ways. She seems full of the rebuilding of St. Nicholas, and to be making great friends with your new daughter. You don't think," lowering her voice, "that Raymond would have any objection to meeting her?"

"Certainly not!"

"I did not suppose he would, but I thought I would just ask you. It would be rather marked not to invite him for the 3rd, you know; and Jenny was always so fond of poor Emily, kept up a correspondence with her to the last. It was the first time she had met the little one since they came back. Not that she is little now, she is very tall and quite handsome *even* by the side of Edith. We just saw Lady Rosamond—a sweet face—and Herbert perfectly raves about her!"

"She is a most unselfish warm-hearted creature!" said Mrs. Poynsett.

"I am so glad! And Miles's wife, I hope she will come. Poor thing, she looks very poorly."

"Yes, I am very anxious about her. If she is not better in a day or two, I shall insist on her having advice."

"Poor dear, I don't wonder! But she had better come to Strawyers; Jenny will cheer her if anyone can, and we shall have a nice lively party, I hope! She will only mope the more if she never goes out."

"I am afraid she is hardly equal to it; besides, poor child," added Mrs. Poynsett, "she seems to have been strictly brought up, and to think our ways rather shocking; and Miles wrote to me not to press her to go into society till he comes home."

"Ah! well, I call that a mistake!" puffed out good-humoured Mrs. Bowater. "Very bad for the poor girl's spirits. By-the-by, I hope Julius does not object to Herbert's dancing—not at a public ball, you know, but at home—for if he did, I would try to arrange something else, it would be so hard for the poor boy to have to look on."

"I don't know. I don't think he could," said the mother, considering.

"You see, we thought of a dinner-party for as many as possible. Frank and Charlie won't mind dining in the school-room, I know, and having the rest for a dance in the evening; but if Julius did think it unclerical—Jenny says he won't, and Papa laughs, and says, 'Poh! poh! Julius is no fool;' but people

are so much more particular than they used to be, and I would not get the dear boy into a scrape for the world."

Mrs. Poynsett undertook to ascertain his opinions on this knotty point, and to let her know if they were adverse; and then she begged for a visit from Jenny, whose brother had no accommodation for her in his lodgings. She could not be spared till after the entertainment on the 3rd, nor till a visit from her married sister was over; but afterwards, her mother was delighted that she should come and look after Herbert, who seemed as much on the maternal mind as if he had not batted his way through Eton, and boated it through Oxford.

Mrs. Poynsett obtained her word with Julius in good time that evening. He laughed a little. "Poor Herbs! when will people understand that it is the spirit of the thing, the pursuit, not the individual chance participation in any particular amusement, that is unclerical, as they are pleased to call it?"

"What do you think of Herbert?"

"A boy, and a very nice boy; but if he doesn't get his healthful play somehow, he will burst out like a closed boiler some day."

"A muscular Christian on your hands?"

"Not theoretically, for he has been well taught; but it's a great animal that needs to work off its steam, and if I had known it, I would not have undertaken the problem of letting him do that, without

setting up bad habits, or scandalizing the parish and Bindon—who is young the other way, and has no toleration. We had this morning's service in a state of siege from all the dogs. Herbert thought he had shut them safely up, but they were all at his heels in the churchyard; and though he rated them home, and shut all the doors, we heard them whining and scratching at each in turn."

"I thought I should have died of it," said Rosamond, entering. "His face grew red enough to set his surplice on fire, and Mr. Bindon glared at him, and he missed his verse in the Psalm; for there was the bull terrier, crouching and looking abject at the vestry-door, just restrained by his eye from coming further."

"What shall you do about it, Julius?" asked his mother, much amused.

"Oh, that will remedy itself. All dogs learn to understand the bell."

And then the others began to drop in, and were told of the invitation that was coming.

"I say, Rosamond," cried Charlie, "can brothers and sisters-in-law dance together?"

"That depends on how the brothers-in-law dance," returned Rosamond. "Someone, for pity's sake, play a waltz!—Come along, Charlie! the hall is a sweet place for it!—Whistle, Julius!—Frank, whistle!"

And away she whirled. Frank, holding out his

hands, was to his surprise accepted by Cecil, and disappeared with her into the hall. Julius stood by the mantel-piece, with the first shadow on his brow his mother had seen since his arrival. Presently he spoke in a defensive apologetic tone: "She has always been used to this style of thing."

"Most naturally," said the mother.

"Not that they ever did more than their position required, and Lady Rathforlane is a truly careful mother. Of course some things might startle you stay-at-home people; but in all essentials—"

"I see what you mean."

"And what seems like rattle is habit."

"Simple *gaieté de cœur!*"

"So it is better to acquiesce till it subsides of itself. You see it is hard, after such a life of change and variety, to settle down into a country parsonage."

"What are you saying there?" said Rosamond, tripping in out of breath.

"That I don't know how you are to put up with a pink-eyed parson, and a hum-drum life," said Julius, holding out a caressing hand.

"Now that's hard," pleaded she; "only because I took a frolic with Baby Charles! I say, Julius, shall we give it up altogether, and stay at home like good children? I believe that is what would suit the old Rabbit much better than his kid gloves,"—and her sweet face looked up at him with a meek candid gaze.

"No," he said, "that would not do. The Bowaters are our oldest friends. But, Rosie, as you *are* a clergyman's wife, could you not give up round dances?"

"Oh no, no! That's too bad. I'd rather never go to a dance at all, than sit still, or be elbowed about in the square dances. You never told me you expected that!"—and her tones were of a child petulant at injustice.

"Suppose," he said, as a delightful solution, "you only gratified Frank and Charlie by waltzing with them."

She burst into a ringing laugh. "My brothers-in-law! How very ridiculous! Suppose you included the curates?"

"You know what I mean," he said gravely.

"Oh, bother the parson's wife! Haven't I seen them figuring away by scores? Did we ever have a regimental ball that they were not the keenest after?'

"So they get themselves talked of!" said Julius, as Anne's quiet entrance broke up the dialogue.

Mrs. Poynsett had listened, glad there was no appeal to her, conscious that she did not understand the merits of the case, and while she doubted whether her eldest son had love enough, somewhat afraid lest his brother had not rather too much for the good of his lawful supremacy.

CHAPTER VII.

UNFRUITFUL SUGGESTIONS.

"RAYMOND! Can you spare me a moment before you go into your mother's room?"

It was Rosamond who, to his surprise, as he was about to go down-stairs, met him and drew him into her apartment—his mother's own dressing-room, which he had not entered since the accident.

"Is anything the matter?" he said, thinking that Julius might have spared him from complaints of Cecil.

"Oh no! only one never can speak to you, and Julius told me that you could tell me about Mrs. Poynsett. I can't help thinking she could be moved more than she is." Then, as he was beginning to speak, "Do you know that, the morning of the fire, I carried her with only one of the maids to the couch under the tent-room window? Susan was frightened out of her wits, but she was not a bit the worse for it."

"Ah! that was excitement."

"But if it did not hurt her then, why should it hurt her again? There's old General M'Kinnon, my father's old friend, who runs about everywhere in a wheeled-chair with a leg-rest; and I can't think why she should not do the same."

Raymond smiled kindly on her, but rather sadly; perhaps he was recollecting his morning's talk about the occupancy of the drawing-room. "You know it is her spine," he said.

"So it is with him. His horse rolled over him at Sebastopol, and he has never walked since. I wanted to write to Mary M'Kinnon; but Julius said I had better talk to you, because he was only at home for a fortnight, when she was at the worst, and you knew more about it."

"Yes," said Raymond, understanding more than the Irish tongue fully expressed. "I never saw a woman sit better than she did, and she looked as young and light in the saddle as you could, till that day, when, after the rains, the bank where the bridle-path to Squattles End was built up, gave way with the horse's feet, and down she went twenty feet, and was under the horse when Miles and I got down to her! We brought her on a mattress to that room, not knowing whether she were alive; and she has never moved out of it! It was agony to her to be touched."

"Yes, but it can't be that now. Was not that three years ago?"

"Not so much. Two and a half. We had Hayter

down to see her, and he said perfect rest was the only chance for her."

"And has not he seen her lately?"

"He died last winter; and old Worth, who comes in once a week to look at her, is not fit for more than a little watching and attention. I dare say we all have learnt to acquiesce too much in her present state, and that more might be done. You see, she has never had a lady's care, except now and then Jenny Bowater's."

"I do feel sure she could bear more now," said Rosamond eagerly. "It would be such a thing if she could only be moved about that down-stairs floor."

"And be with us at meals and in the evening," said Raymond, his face lightening up. "Thank you, Rosamond!"

"I'll write to Mary M'Kinnon to-morrow, to ask about the chair," cried Rosamond; and Raymond, hearing the door-bell, hurried down, to find his wife standing alone over the drawing-room fire, not very complacent.

"Where have you been, Raymond?"

"I was talking to Rosamond. She has seen a chair on which it might be possible to move my mother about on this floor."

"I thought—" Cecil flushed. She was on the point of saying she thought Rosamond was not to interfere in her department any more than she in Rosamond's; but she kept it back, and changed it into "Surely the doctor and nurses must know best."

"A fresh eye often makes a difference," said Raymond. "To have her among us again—!" but he was cut short by the announcement of Mr. and Miss Fuller.

"Poor Mr. Fuller," as everyone called him, was the Incumbent of St. Nicholas, Willansborough, a college living always passed by the knowing old bachelor fellows, and as regularly proving a delusion to the first junior in haste for a wife. Twenty-five years ago Mr. Fuller had married upon this, which, as Mr. Bindon said, was rather a reason for not marrying—a town with few gentry, and a petty unthriving manufacture, needing an enormous amount of energy to work it properly, and getting—Mr. Fuller, with force yearly decreasing under the pressure of a sickly wife, ill-educated, unsatisfactory sons, and unhealthy, aimless daughters. Of late some assistance had been obtained, but only from Mr. Driver, the "coach" or cramming tutor, who was directing the studies of Frank and half a dozen more youths, and his aid was strictly limited to a share in the Sunday services.

The eldest daughter accompanied the Vicar. Her mother had not health (or perhaps clothes) for a dinner-party, and it was the first time she had ever been in the house. Very shy and in much awe she was! Cecil viewed her as a constituent, and was elaborately civil and patronising, doing the honours of all the photographs and illustrations on which she could lay hands, and only eliciting alternately "Very

nice," and "How sweet!" A little more was made of the alarms of the fire, and the preparations for clearing the house, and there was a further thaw about the bazaar. It would be such a relief from plain work, and she could get some lovely patterns from her cousin who had a missionary basket; but as to the burnt-out families, the little knowledge or interest she seemed to have about them was rather astounding, unless, as Rosamond suspected, she thought it "shop," and uninteresting to the great ladies of Compton-Poynsett Hall.

Meanwhile, her father made the apprehended request for the loan of Compton Church during the intervals of services, and when the Rector explained how brief those intervals would be, looked astonished and drily complimented him on his energy and his staff, somewhat as if the new broom were at the bottom of these congratulations.

The schools were to be used for services until a temporary iron church could be obtained, for which Julius, to make up for his churlishness in withholding his own church, made the handsomer donation, and held out hopes of buying it afterwards for the use of Squattles End. Then, having Mr. Fuller's ear to himself, he ventured to say, though cautiously, as to one who had been a clergyman before he was born, "I wish it were possible to dispense with this bazaar."

Mr. Fuller shrugged his shoulders. "If everyone subscribed in the style of this family."

"They would be more likely to do so, without the appeal to secondary motives."

"Try them," said the elder man.

"Exactly what I want to do. I would put up the four walls, begin with what you get from the insurance, a weekly offertory, and add improvements as means came in. This is not visionary. I have seen proof of its success."

"It may serve in new-fashioned city missions, but in an old-established place like this it would create nothing but offence. When you have been in Orders as long as I have, you will find that there is nothing for it but to let people do what they will, not what one thinks best."

"Mr. Fuller," said Julius eagerly, "will you try an experiment? Drop this bazaar, and I promise you our collection every Sunday evening for the year, giving notice of it to my people, and to such of yours as may be present."

"I do not despise your offer," said Mr. Fuller, laying his hand upon his arm. "You mean it kindly, and if I were in your place, or had only my own feelings to consider, I might attempt it. But it would be only mischievous to interfere with the bazaar. Lady Tyrrell—all the ladies, in fact—have set their minds on it, and if I objected there would instantly be a party cry against me, and that is the one thing I have always avoided."

His tone of superior wisdom, meek and depressed

as he always was, tried the Rector's patience enough to make his forehead burn and bring out his white eye-brows in strong relief. "How about a blessing on the work?" he asked, suppressing so much that he hardly knew this was spoken aloud.

Again Mr. Fuller smiled. He had been a bit of a humorist when he was an Oxford don. "Speak of that to Briggs," he said, "and he would answer, 'Cash for me, and the blessing may take care of itself.' As to the ladies—why, they deafen you about blessings on their humble efforts, and the widow's mite."

"Simply meaning that they want their amusement a little—"

"Buttered over," said Mr. Fuller, supplying the word. "Though you are hard on them, Charnock—I don't know about the fine ladies; but there are quiet folk who will work their fingers to the bone, and can do nothing else."

"That's true," said Julius; "and one would gladly find a safe outlet for their diligence."

"You do not trust to it for bringing the blessing," said Mr. Fuller, in a tone that Julius liked even less than the mere hopeless faint-heartedness, for in it there was sarcasm on faith in aught but £ *s. d.*

The two brothers held another discussion on this matter later that night, on the stairs, as they were on their way to their rooms.

"Won't you come to this meeting to-morrow, Julius?" asked Raymond.

"I don't see that I should be of any use, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you would make what seems to me the right proposal, and I could be any support in it."

"What's that?"

"To use the insurance to put up the mere shells and plain indispensable fittings of the church and town-hall, then make the drainage of Water Lane and Hall Street the first object for the rates, while the church is done by subscription and voluntary effort."

"You put the drainage first—even before the church?" said Raymond, smiling, with an elder brother's satisfaction in such an amount of common sense.

"Of course I do," said Julius. "An altar and four walls and chairs are all that ought to be sought for. Little good can be done to people's souls while their bodies are in the feverish discomfort of foul air and water. This is an opportunity not to be wasted, while all the houses are down, town-hall and all."

"The very thing I told Briggs and the others this morning," said Raymond; "but I could not get a hearing; they said there never had been any illness worth mentioning, and in fact scouted the whole matter, as people always do."

"Yes, they take it as a personal insult when you mention the odorous—or odious, savours sweet," said

Julius. "I heard a good deal of that when we had the spell of cholera at St. Awdry's."

"I shall work on at it, and I trust to get it done in time," said Raymond; "but it will not be at once. The subject is too new to them, and the irritation it produces must subside before they will hear reason. Besides, the first thing is to employ and feed these paper-makers."

"Of course."

"That will pretty well absorb this first meeting. The ladies will manage that, I think; and when this is provided for, I will try what I can do at the committee; but there is no good in bringing it forward at this great public affair, when every ass can put in his word. Everything depends on whom they choose for the new mayor. If Whitlock comes in, there is some chance of sense and reason being heard. Good night."

As Raymond said, the more immediate object of the meeting fixed for the ensuing day, was to provide for the employment of the numerous women thrown out of employment by the destruction of the paper mills. A subscription was in hand, but not adequate to the need; and moreover, it was far more expedient to let them maintain themselves.

How this was to be done was the question. Cecil told her husband that at Dunstone they made the women knit stockings; and he replied by recommending the suppression of Dunstone. How strange

it was that what she had been used to consider as the source of honour should be here held in what seemed to her disesteem!

Lady Tyrrell's ponies were tinkling up to the door of the hotel where the meeting was to be held, and her gracious smile recalled Cecil's good humour; Raymond saw them to their seats, and then had to go and take the chair himself on the platform—first, however, introducing his wife to such of the ladies present as he recollected.

She thought he wanted her to sit between melancholy white-faced Mrs. Fuller and a bony spinster in a poke-bonnet whom he called Miss Slater; but Cecil concluding that this last could have no vote, and that the Vicarage was secure, felt free to indulge herself by getting back to Lady Tyrrell, who had scarcely welcomed her before exclaiming, "Mrs. Duncombe, I did not know you were returned."

"I came back on the first news of your flare-up," said the new comer. "I only came down this morning. I would not have missed this meeting for anything. It is a true woman's question. A fair muster, I see," looking round with her eye-glass, and bowing to several on the platform, especially to Raymond, who returned the bow rather stiffly.

"Ah! let me introduce you," said Lady Tyrrell. "Mrs. Raymond Charnock Poynsett."

"I am very glad to see you embarked in the cause," said the lady, frankly holding out her hand, "May

we often meet in the same manner, though I honestly tell you I'm not of your party; I should go dead against your husband if we only had a chance."

"Come, you need not be so aggressive," laughed Lady Tyrrell; "you haven't a vote yet. You are frightening Mrs. Poynsett."

It was true. Even Cecil Charnock was born too late to be one of the young ladies who, in the first decades of the reformed Parliament, used to look on a Liberal as a *lusus naturæ*, whom they hardly believed to be a gentleman. But a lady who would openly accost the member's bride with a protest against his politics, was a being beyond her experience, and the contemplation fairly distracted her from her husband's oratory.

She would have taken Miss Slater for the strong-minded female far rather than this small slim person, with the complexion going with the yellower species of red hair and chignon, not unlike a gold-pheasant's, while the thin aquiline nose made Cecil think of Queen Elizabeth. The dress was a tight-fitting black silk, with a gorgeous many-coloured gold-embroidered oriental mantle thrown loosely over it, and a Tyrolean hat, about as large as the pheasant's comb, tipped over her forehead, with cords and tassels of gold; and she made little restless movements and whispered remarks during the speeches.

There was to be a rate to renew the town-hall. The rebuilding of the paper mills and dwelling houses

was fairly covered by the insurance; but the Vicar, in his diffident apologetic voice, stated that the church had been insufficiently insured, and moreover, that many more sittings were needed than the former building had contained. He then read the list of subscriptions already promised, expressed hopes of more coming in, invited ladies to take collecting cards, and added that he was happy to announce that the ladies of his congregation had come forward with all the beneficence of their sex, and raised a sum to supply a new set of robes.

Here the chairman glanced at his wife, but she was absorbed in watching Mrs. Duncombe's restless hands; and the look was intercepted by Lady Tyrrell's eyes, which flashed back sympathetic amusement, with just such a glance as used to pass between them in old times; but the effect was to make the member's face grave and impassive, and his eyes fix on the papers before him.

The next moment Cecil was ardently gazing at Mr. Fuller as he proceeded to his hopes of the bazaar to be held under the most distinguished patronage, and of which he spoke as if it were the subject of anticipations as sanguine as any the poor man could ever appear to indulge in. And there was, in fact, the greatest stamping and cheering there has yet been, perhaps in compliment to the M.P.'s young bride—at least, so Lady Tyrrell whispered, adding that everybody was trying to see her.

Then Mr. Charnock Poynsett himself took up the exposition of the third branch of the subject, the support of the poor families thrown out of work at the beginning of winter. There could be no employment at the paper mills till they were repaired; and after the heavy losses, they could not attempt to keep their people together by any payment. It had been suggested that the readiest way of meeting the difficulty, would be to employ the subscriptions already promised in laying in a stock of material to be made up into garments, and then dispose of them out to the women at their homes; and appointing a day once a week when the work should be received, the pay given, and fresh material supplied, by a party of volunteer ladies.

This was, in fact, what he had been instructed to propose by the kindly souls who ordinarily formed the St. Nicholas *bureau de charité*, who had instructed him to be their mouth-piece. There was due applause as the Mayor seconded his resolution; but in the midst a clear, rather high-pitched voice rose up close to Cecil, saying "Mr. Chairman, allow me to ask what sale is anticipated for these garments?"

"I am told that there is a demand for them among the poor themselves," said Raymond, judiciously concealing how much he was taken aback by this female interference.

"Allow me to differ. A permanent work society numbering a few women otherwise unemployed may find a sufficient sale in the neighbourhood under the

patronage of charitable ladies; but when you throw in ninety-five or one hundred pair of hands depending on their work for their livelihood, the supply must necessarily soon go beyond any demand, even fictitious. It will not do to think of these women like fancy-knitters or embroiderers whose work is skilled. Most of them can hardly mend their own clothes, and the utmost that can be expected of them is the roughest slop-work."

"Do you wish any expedient to be proposed?" asked the Chairman, in a sort of aside.

"Yes, I have one. I spent yesterday in collecting information."

"Will Captain Duncombe move it?" suggested Raymond.

"Oh no! he is not here. No, it is no use to instruct anybody; I will do it myself, if you please."

And before the astonished eyes of the meeting, the gold-pheasant hopped upon the platform, and with as much ease as if she had been Queen Bess dragooning her parliament, she gave what even the astounded gentlemen felt to be a sensible practical exposition of ways and means.

She had obtained the address of a warehouse ready to give such rough work as the women could be expected to do; but as they were unaccustomed to work at home, and were at present much crowded from the loss of so many houses, and could besides be little depended on for working well enough without

superintendence, her plan was to hire a room, collect the women, and divide the superintendence between the ladies; who should give out the work, see that it was properly done, keep order, and the like. She finished off in full order, by moving a resolution to this effect.

There was a pause, and a little consultation among the gentlemen, ending by Raymond's absolutely telling Mr. Fuller that it was a very sensible practical arrangement, and that it *must* be seconded; which the Vicar accordingly did, and it was carried without opposition, as in truth nothing so good had been thought of; and the next thing was to name a committee of ladies, a treasurer and auditor of accounts. There would be no work on Saturdays, so if the ladies would each undertake half a day once a fortnight, the superintendence need not be a burthen.

Mrs. Duncombe and Miss Slater undertook the first start and preliminary arrangements, then each would take her half day in rotation. Lady Tyrrell and her sister undertook two, Cecil two more, and others were found to fill up the vacant space. The chairman moved a vote of thanks to the lady for her suggestion, which she acknowledged by a gracious bow, not without triumph; and the meeting broke up.

Someone asked after Captain Duncombe as she descended into private life. "There's a wonderful filly that absorbs all his attention. All Wilsbro' might burn as long as Dark Hag thrives! When do

I expect him? I don't know; it depends on Dark Hag," she said in a tone of superior good-natured irony, then gathered up the radiant mantle and tripped off along the central street of the little old-fashioned country town, with gravelled not paved side-walks.

"Isn't she very superior?" said Cecil, when her husband had put her on horseback.

"I suppose she is very clever."

"And she spoke capitally."

"If she were to speak. What would your father think of her?"

But for the first time Cecil's allegiance had experienced a certain shock. Some sort of pedestal had hitherto been needful to her existence; she was learning that Dunstone was an unrecognised elevation in this new country, and she had seen a woman attain to a pinnacle that almost dazzled her, by sheer resource and good sense.

All the discussion she afterwards heard did not tend to shake her opinion; Raymond recounted the adventure at his mother's kettle-drum, telling of his own astonishment at the little lady's assurance.

"I do not see why she should be censured," said Cecil. "You were all at a loss without her."

"She should have got her husband to speak for her," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"He was not there."

"Then she should have instructed some other

gentleman," said Mrs. Poynsett. "A woman spoils all the effect of her doings by putting herself out of her proper place."

"Perfectly disgusting!" said Julius.

Cecil had decidedly not been disgusted, except by the present strong language; and not being ready at repartee, she was pleased when Rosamond exclaimed, "Ah! that's just what men like, to get instructed in private by us poor women, and then gain all the credit for originality."

"It is the right way," said the mother. "The woman has much power of working usefully and gaining information, but the one thing that is not required of her is to come forward in public."

"Very convenient for the man!" laughed Rosamond.

"And scarcely fair," said Cecil.

"Quite fair," said Rosamond, turning round, so that Cecil only now perceived that she had been speaking in jest. "Any woman who is worth a sixpence had rather help her husband to shine than shine herself."

"Besides," said Mrs. Poynsett, "the delicate edges of true womanhood ought not to be frayed off by exposure in public."

"Yes," said Raymond. "The gain of an inferior power of man in public would be far from compensated by the loss in private of that which man can never supply."

"Granted," said Rosamond slyly though sleepily,

"that it always is an inferior power of man, which it does not seem to have been in the actual case."

"It was a point on which she had special knowledge and information," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"And you were forced to thank her," said Cecil.

"Yes, in common civility," said Raymond; "but it was as much as I could do to get it done, the position was a false one altogether."

"In fact, you were all jealous," said Rosamond.

At which everybody laughed, which was her sole intention; but Cecil, who had said so much less, really thought what Rosamond said in mere play. Those extorted thanks seemed to her a victory of her sex in a field she had never thought of; and though she had no desire to emulate the lady, and felt that a daughter of Dunstone must remember *noblesse oblige*, the focus of her enthusiasm was in an odd state of shifting.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNSATISFACTORY.

ON the evening of the party at Strawyers, Mrs. Poynsett lay on her sofa, thinking, with a trying recurrence, of that unfortunate and excellent German Dauphine, who was pronounced by the Duchess of Orleans to have died of her own stupidity.

After a fortnight had brought no improvement, but rather the reverse, to poor Anne's wan looks and feeble languid deportment, Mrs. Poynsett had insisted on her seeing the doctor; and had been assured by him that there was nothing amiss, and that if Mrs. Miles Charnock could only be roused and occupied she would be perfectly well, but that her pining and depression might so lower her tone as to have a serious effect on her health.

There was no hope of her husband's return for at least a year, very likely eighteen months. What was to be done with her? What could be a more unpropitious fate than for a Colonial girl, used to an active life of exertion and usefulness, and trained to all

domestic arts, to be set down in a great English household where there was really nothing for her to do, and usefulness or superintendence would have been interfering; besides, as Miles had thoughts of settling at the Cape, English experience would serve her little.

She had not cultivation enough for any pursuit to interest her. She was not musical, could not draw; and when Mrs. Poynsett had, by way of experiment, asked her to read aloud an hour a day, and selected the Lives of the Lindsays, as an unexceptionable and improving book, full of Scottish history, and even with African interest, she dutifully did her task as an attention to her invalid mother-in-law, but in a droning husky tone, finding it apparently as severe a penance as it was to her auditor.

The doctor's chief prescription was horse exercise; but what would a constitutional canter be to one acccustomed to free rides through the Bush? And she would generally be alone; for even if Charlie, her nearest approach to an ally, had not been going away from home in a few weeks, it could not be expected that he could often ride with her.

It was plain that every one of the whole family was giving continual shocks to Mr. Pilgrim's disciple, even when they felt most innocent; and though the mother was sometimes disposed to be angry, sometimes to laugh at the little shudder and compression of the lips she began to know, she perceived what

an addition this must be to the unhappiness of the poor lonely stranger.

"She must be set to some good work," thought Mrs. Poynsett; "Julius might let her go to his old women. She might get on with them better than with the old women here. And there's Cecil's working affair, it would be just the thing to give her an object. I think I can get through this evening. I've made Susan bring my desk, with all Miles's letters from his first voyage. Shall I suppress the ball?"

Therewith Cecil made her entrance, in glossy white satin and deep lace, beautiful to behold, set off with rainbow glistening opals. She made a quiet complacent show of herself, as one not vain of fine clothes, but used to an affectionate family appreciation of her best attire; and it was the most friendly child-like bit of intimacy that had yet been attained between her and Mrs. Poynsett.

And when she sat down to wait for the others, Mrs. Poynsett ventured on telling her the prescription and her own perplexity, hoping for a voluntary offer to employ Anne at Willansborough; but Cecil only pitied her for having "no resources;" and when Mrs. Poynsett ventured to suggest finding a niche for her in the work-room, the answer was—"Our days are all disposed of."

"You have two, I think?"

"True; but it would never do for me to give up

one of my times. If I seemed to slacken, everyone else would."

"What will you do when the Session begins?"

"I shall make some arrangement. I do not think Anne could ever take my place; she would have no authority."

Anne herself here entered, took her knitting and sat down, apparently unaware of the little pluming gesture by which Cecil unconsciously demanded attention to her bridal satin. One white-gloved gentleman after another dropped in, but none presumed on a remark; Jenkins announced the carriages; but Rosamond had not appeared, and after an excursion up-stairs, Julius returned, declaring that the first carriage must not wait for her, they would come afterwards in the van, for there was something amiss in the dress, she had not had it on since the wedding.

"And she came in so late," said Cecil.

"That was my fault," he said. "We came through the village to leave a message at the doctor's;" and he then insisted that the other pair should set off, taking Frank and Charlie, and prevent dinner from being kept waiting; at which the boys made faces, and declared that it was a dodge of his to join Jenny's party in the school-room, instead of the solemn dinner; but they were obliged to submit; and it was not till twenty minutes later, that in glided something white, with blue cashmere and swans-down over it, moving, as usual, with languid grace.

"Poor Julius!" smiled Rosamond with her dawdling dignity. "Every single thing turned out a misfit! As it is, there's a monstrous hole in my glove, which demands the benevolent fiction of my having torn it by the way. There, one second for the effect!—Good-bye, dear Mrs. Poynsett;—good-bye, Anne. Come, you monument of patience and resignation!"

For one moment she had slipped back her little mantle, then drawn it on, as, taking her husband's arm, she left the room; but that moment had set Anne's cheeks aflame, and left Mrs. Poynsett in a startled state of uncertainty, hoping her glance had been mistaken, wondering what could have been *more* amiss, and feeling incapable of entering on the subject with that severe young judge, of narrow experience.

Never had her eldest son failed to come and bid her good-night on his way to his own room: it was the great break in her long sleepless hours, and she used to call it a reversal of the relations of those days when he used to watch for her kiss on her way to bed. Nor did he fail her now, but came and stood over her with his fragmentary tidings.

"An immense party—oh yes, there was he persuading them not to wait. Mr. Bowater took Rosamond in to dinner, Cecil went with Sir Harry Vivian. Yes, Lady Tyrrell was there, wonderfully handsome, but her expression strikes me as altered; there is the sort of pathetic look that, as Cecil said, is like the

melancholy Medusa—I wonder if it is genuine. She seems greatly disposed to cultivate Cecil—I wonder what she does it for."

"Is Cecil attracted? I fancied she was."

"Yes, a good deal; and I fear the Wilsbro' business will throw them together. It is unlucky on Frank's account likewise. I see we shall have it all over again there."

"I have great hope in his office taking him away. How was it with them to-night?"

"What I should call arrant coquetry, such as even Camilla never indulged in. The girl kept out of his way—was absolutely chill and repelling half the evening—throwing herself at the officers from Backsworth, till at last Frank obtained a waltz, and after that they were perfectly inseparable."

"If she coquets, she will soon disgust him! Did Cecil enjoy herself?"

"Oh yes: Phil Bowater opened the ball with her, and she dances very nicely—so quietly, Mrs. Bowater remarked it. As to Rosamond, she was in her native element—*is* indeed, for she would not hear of coming away when we did."

"And Julius?"

"Standing in a door-way, with others of his kind, absently talking, and watching Rosamond out of the tail of his eye. I say, Mother," lowering his voice, "can't you give Rosamond a hint about her dress? Cecil says she can't go out with her again like *that.*

Ah," as he heard a sigh, "I should not have worried you at night."

"No, you have not. Tell Cecil I will see about it. Rosamond will take it best from an old woman like me."

Mrs. Poynsett was quite conscious that Cecil had more high breeding and refinement than Rosamond, who was essentially the Irish Colonel's daughter, and that the cold temperament of the one irritated the warm nature of the other. More than one flash had revealed Rosamond's contempt for Cecil's assumptions and intolerance for her precision—besides, she was five years older, and had not an ideal in Dunstone.

After revolving what form of remonstrance would be least offensive during half the night and day, Mrs. Poynsett was not prepared for the appearance, about noon, of her son Julius, when, coming to what she termed the confidential side of her couch, he asked hesitatingly, and colouring, "Mother, I want you to tell me, was there anything amiss in Rose's dress last night?"

"You did not perceive—"

"I'm not used to the style of thing. Is it not the way with what you call full dress?"

"To a certain degree—" she began.

He caught her up. "And here has Cecil been putting my poor Rose into a perfect agony! It is only woman's censorious nonsense, isn't it, Mother? Mere folly to think otherwise! I knew you would set

my mind at rest; and if you would tell Cecil that you will not have Rosamond insulted, it would be as well."

"Stay, Julius," as he was walking off complacently, "I grieve; but I must confess that I was going to speak to Rosamond myself."

He looked very blank.

"Mind, I am certain that it is only an innocent following of what she has been brought up to;" and as he signed a sort of hurt acquiescence, as if trying to swallow the offence, she added, "when do you go out again?"

"Not till Monday, when we dine at Colonel Ross's. He is an old friend of Lord Rathforlane."

"Then I am inclined to let it cool. Sometimes advice that has been resented does its work."

"You don't think the interference justifiable?"

"Not from that quarter."

"And can it be needful to attend to it?"

"My dear Julius, it is not a style of dress I could ever have worn, nor have let my daughters have worn, if I had had any."

"Conclusive, that!" said Julius, getting up, more really angered with his mother than he had been since his childhood.

However, he conquered himself by the time he had reached the door, and came back to say, "I beg your pardon, Mother, I know you would not say so without need."

"Thank you, my boy!" and he saw tears in her eyes, the first time he was conscious of having brought them. As he bent down to kiss her, she rallied, and cheerfully said, "I have no doubt it will all come right—Rosamond is too nice not to feel it at once."

No such thing; Rosamond was still furious. If he disapproved, she would submit to him; but he had seen nothing wrong, had he?

"My dear Rose, I told you I was no judge: you forget what my eyes are; and my mother—"

"You have been to your mother?"

"My dear, what could I do?"

"And you think I am going to insult my own mother and sisters to please any woman's finical prudish notions? Pray what did Mrs. Poynsett say?"

The excuse of custom, pleaded by Mrs. Poynsett, only made Rosamond fiercer. She wished she had never come where she was to hear that her own mother was no judge of propriety, and her husband could not trust her, but must needs run about asking everybody if she were fit to be seen. Such a tempest Julius had never seen outside a back street in the garrison town. There seemed to be nothing she would not say, and his attempts at soothing only added to her violence. Indeed, there was only one thing which would have satisfied her, and that was, that she had been perfectly right and the whole world barbarously wrong; and

she was wild with passion at perceiving that he had a confidence in his own mother, which he could not feel in hers.

Nor would he insist that Raymond should force Cecil to apologize. "My dear," he said, "don't you know there are things easier to ask than to obtain?"

To which Rosamond replied, in another gust, that she would never again sit down to table with Cecil until she had apologized for the insult, not to herself, she did not care about that, but to the mother who had seen her dresses tried on: Julius must tell Raymond so, or take her away to any cottage at once. She would not stay where people blamed Mamma and poisoned his mind against her! She believed he cared for them more than for her!

Julius had sympathized far longer with her offended feeling than another could have done; but he was driven to assert himself. "Nonsense, Rose, you know better," he said, in a voice of displeasure; but she pouted forth, "I don't know it. You believe everyone against me, and you won't take my part against that nasty little spiteful prig!"

"Cecil has behaved very ill to you," said Julius, granting her rather over much; "but she is a foolish conceited child, who does not deserve that Raymond should be worried about her. I foresee plenty of grievances from her; but, Rosie, we must and will not let her come between us and Raymond. You

don't know what a brother he has been to me—I hardly think I could have got through my first year at school but for him; and I don't think my sweet Rose could wish to do me such an ill turn as to stir up a feud with such a brother because his wife is provoking."

The luncheon-bell began to sound, and she sobbed out, "There then, go down, leave me alone! Go to them, since you are so fond of them all!"

"I don't think you could come down as you are," said Julius gravely; "I will bring you something."

"It would choke me—choke me!" she sobbed out.

Julius knew enough of the De Lancy temperament to be aware that words carried them a long way, and he thought solitude would be so beneficial, that he summoned resolution to leave her; but he had not the face to appear alone, nor offer fictions to excuse her absence, so he took refuge in his dressing-room, until he had seen Cecil and Anne ride away from the hall door together.

For the two sisters-in-law had held a little indignation meeting, and Rosamond's misdemeanour had so far drawn them together, that Cecil had offered to take Anne to see the working party, and let her assist thereat.

The coast being clear, Julius went down, encountering nothing worse than the old butler, who came in while he was cutting cold beef, and to whom he said,

"Lady Rosamond is rather knocked up; I am going to take her something up-stairs."

Jenkins received this as the result of a dance, but much wanted to fetch a tray, which Julius refused, and set off with an ale-glass in one hand, and in the other the plates with the beef and appliances, Jenkins watching in jealous expectation of a catastrophe, having no opinion of Mr. Julius's powers as a waiter. He was disappointed. The downfall was deferred till the goal was reached, and was then most salutary, for Rosamond sprang to pick up the knife and fork, laughed at his awkwardness, refused to partake without him, produced implements from her travelling-bag, and was as merry as she had been miserable.

Not a word on the feud was uttered; and the pair walked down to the village, where she was exemplary, going into all those more distasteful parts of her duties there, which she sometimes shirked.

And on her return, finding her long-expected letter from Miss M'Kinnon awaiting her, she forgot all offences in her ardour to indoctrinate everybody with the hopes it gave of affording Mrs. Poynsett a change of room, if not even greater variety. Unfortunately, this eagerness was not met with a corresponding fervour. There was in the household the acquiescence with long established invalidism, that sometimes settles down and makes a new-comer's innovations unwelcome. Raymond had spoken to the old doctor, who had been timid and discouraging;

Susan resented the implication that the utmost had not been done for her dear mistress; and Mrs. Poynsett herself, though warmly grateful for Rosamond's affection, was not only nervously unwilling to try experiments, but had an instinctive perception that there was one daughter-in-law to whom her increased locomotion would scarcely be welcome, and by no means wished to make this distaste evident to Raymond.

Cecil would not have been so strong against the risk and imprudence, if her wishes had been the other way. Moreover, she had been warned off from interference with the Rector's wife in the village, and she did not relish Rosamond's making suggestions as to her province, as she considered the house—above all, when she viewed that lady as in a state of disgrace. It was nothing less than effrontery; and Cecil became stiffer and colder than ever. She demanded of her mother-in-law whether there had been any promise of amendment.

"Oh! Julius will see to all that," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"It is a woman's question," returned Cecil.

"Not entirely."

"Fancy a clergyman's wife! If Mrs. Venn had appeared in that way at Dunstone!"

"You would have left it to Mr. Venn! My dear, the less said, the sooner mended."

Cecil was silenced, but shocked, for she was far too

young and inexperienced to understand that indecorous customs complied with as a matter of course, do not necessarily denote lack of innate modesty—far less, how they could be confounded with home allegiance; and as to Anne, poor Rosamond was, in her eyes, only too like the ladies who impeded Christiana on her outset.

So her ladyship retreated into languid sleepy dignity towards both her sisters-in-law; and on Monday evening showed herself, for a moment, more *decolletée*, if possible, than before. Mrs. Poynsett feared lest Julius were weak in this matter; but at night she had a visit from him.

"Mother," he said, "it will not happen again. Say no more."

"I am only too thankful."

"What do you think settled it? No less than Lady Tyrrell's admiration."

"What could she have said?"

"I can't make out. Rose was far too indignant to be comprehensible, when she told me on the way home; but there was something about adopting the becoming, and a repetition of—of some insolent praise." And his mother felt his quiver of suppressed wrath. "If Rose had been what that woman took her for, she would have been delighted," he continued; "but—"

"It was horrible to her!" said his mother. "And to you. Yes, I knew it would right itself, and I am glad nothing passed about it between us."

"So am I; she quite separates you from Cecil and Anne, and indeed all her anger is with Lady Tyrrell. She will have it there was malice in inciting her to shock old friends and annoy you—a sort of attempt to sympathize her into opposition."

"Which had a contrary effect upon a generous nature."

"Exactly! She thinks nothing too bad for that woman, and declares she is a serpent."

"That's dear Rosamond's anger; but I imagine that when I occur to Camilla's mind, it is as the obstructive old hag, who once stood in her way; and so, without any formed designs, whatever she says of me is coloured by that view."

"Quite possible; and I am afraid the sister is just such another. She seems quite to belong to Mrs. Duncombe's set. I sat next her at dinner, and tried to talk to her, but she would only listen to that young Strangeways."

"Strangeways! I wonder if that is Susan Lorimer's son?"

"Probably, for his Christian name is Lorimer."

"I knew her rather well as a girl. She was old Lord Lorimer's youngest daughter, and we used to walk in the Square gardens together; but I did not see much of her after I married; and after a good while, she married a man who had made a great fortune by mining. I wonder what her son is like?"

"He must be the man, for he is said to be the

millionaire of the regiment. Just the match that Lady Tyrrell would like."

"Ah! that's well," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"From your point of view," said Julius, smiling.

"If he will only speak out before it has had time to go deep with Frank!"

CHAPTER IX.

COLD HEART.

AT that very moment the two sisters in question were driving home in the opposite corners of the carriage in the dark.

"Really, Lenore," was Lady Tyrrell saying, "you are a very impracticable girl."

There was a little low laugh in answer.

"What blast has come and frozen you up into ice?" the elder sister added caressingly; but as she felt for Eleonora's hand in the dark, she obtained nothing but the cold handle of a fan. "That's just it!" she said, laughing; "hard ivory, instead of flesh and blood."

"I can't help it!" was the answer.

"But why not? I'm sure you had admiration enough to turn any girl's head."

No answer.

Lady Tyrrell renewed her address still more tenderly—"Lenore, darling, it is quite needful that you should understand your position."

"I am afraid I understand it only too well," came in a smothered voice.

"It may be very painful, but it ought to be made clear before you how you stand. You know that my father was ruined—there's no word for it but ruined."

"Yes."

"He had to give up the property to the creditors, and live on an allowance."

"I know that."

"And, of course, I can't bear speaking of it; but the house is really let to me. I have taken it as I might any other house to let."

"Yes," again assented Eleonora.

"And do you know why?"

"You said it was for the sake of the old home and my father!" said the girl, with a bitter emphasis on the *said.*

"So it was! It was to give you the chance of redeeming it, and keeping it in the family. It is to be sold, you know, as soon as you are of age, and can give your consent. I can't buy it. Mine is only a jointure, a life income, and you know that you might as well think of Mary buying Golconda; but you —you—with such beauty as yours—might easily make a connection that would save it."

There was only a choked sound.

"I know you feel the situation painfully, after having been mistress so long."

"Camilla, you *know* it is not that!"

"Ah, my dear, I can see farther than you avow. You can't marry till you are twenty-one, you know; but you might be very soon engaged, and then we should see our way. It only depends on yourself. Plenty of means, and no land to tie him down, ready to purchase and to settle down. It would be the very thing; and I see you are a thoroughly sensible girl, Lena."

"Indeed! I am not even sensible enough to know who is to be this purchaser."

"Come, Lena, don't be affected. Why! he was the only poor creature you were moderately gracious to."

"I! what do you mean?"

Lady Tyrrell laughed again.

"Oh!" in a tone of relief, "I can explain all that to you. All the Strangeways family were at Rockpier the winter before you came, and I made great friends with Margaret Strangeways, the eldest sister. I wanted very much to hear about her, for she has had a great deal of ilness and trouble, and I had not ventured to write to her."

"Oh! was that the girl young Debenham gave up because her mother worried him so incessantly, and who went into a Sisterhood?"

"It was she who broke it off. She found he had been forced into it by his family, and was really attached elsewhere. I never knew the rights of it till I saw the brother to-night."

"Very praiseworthy family confidence!"

"Camilla, you know I object to that tone."

"So do most young ladies, my dear—at least by word."

"And once for all, you need have no fancies about Mr. Lorimer Strangeways. I am civil to him, of course, for Margaret's sake; and Lady Susan was very kind to me; but if there were nothing else against him, he is entirely out of the question, for I know he runs horses and bets on them."

"So does everybody, more or less."

"And you! you, Camilla, after what the turf has cost us, can wish me to encourage a man connected with it."

"My dear Lena, I know you had a great shock, which made the more impression because you were such a child; but you might almost as well forswear riding, as men who have run a few horses, or staked a few thousands. Every young man of fortune has done so in his turn, just by way of experiment—as a social duty as often as not."

"Let them," said Eleonora, "as long as I have nothing to do with them."

"What was that pretty French novel—*Sybille*, was it?—where the child wanted to ride on nothing but swans? You will be like her, and have to condescend to ordinary mortals."

"She did not. She died. And, Camilla, I would far rather die than marry a betting man."

"A betting man, who regularly went in for it! You little goose, to think that I would ask you to do that! As you say, we have had enough of that! But to renounce every man who has set foot on a course, or staked a pair of gloves, is to renounce nine out of ten of the world one lives in."

"I do renounce them. Camilla, remember that my mind is made up for ever, and that nothing shall ever induce me to marry a man who meddles with the evils of races."

"Meddles with the evils? I understand, my dear Lena."

"A man who makes a bet," repeated Eleonora.

"We shall see," was her ladyship's light answer, in contrast to the grave tones; "no rules are without exceptions, and I only ask for *one*."

"I shall make none."

"I confess I thought you were coming to your senses; you have been acting so wisely and sensibly ever since you came home, about that young Frank Charnock."

Lady Tyrrell heard a little rustle, but could not see that it was the clasping of two hands over a throbbing heart. "I am very glad you are reasonable enough to keep him at a distance. Poor boy, it was all very well to be friendly with him when we met him in a place like Rockpier, and you were both children; but you are quite right not to let it go on. It would be mere madness."

"For him, yes," murmured the girl.

"And even more so for you. Why, if he had any property worth speaking of, it would be a wretched thing to marry into that family! I am sure I pity those three poor girls! Miles's wife looks perfectly miserable, poor thing, and the other two can't conceal the state of things. She is just the sort of woman who cannot endure a daughter-in-law."

"I thought I heard Lady Rosamond talking very affectionately of her."

"Very excitedly, as one who felt it her duty to stand up for her out-of-doors, whatever she may do in-doors. I saw victory in those plump white shoulders, which must have cost a battle; but whatever Lady Rosamond gains, will make it all the worse for the others. No, Eleonora, I have known Mrs. Poynsett's rancour for many years, and I would wish no one a worse lot than to be her son's *fiancée*, except to be his wife."

"She did not seem to object to these marriages."

"The sons took her by surprise. Besides, Raymond's was the very *parti* mothers seek out for their sons. Depend upon it, she sent him off with her blessing to court the unexceptionable cousin with the family property. Poor Raymond, he is a dutiful son, and he has done the deed; but, if I am not much mistaken, the little lady is made of something neither mother nor son is prepared for, and he has not love enough to tame her with."

"Not love!"

"That may be seen at a glance. He can't help it, poor fellow; he would have had it if he could, like anything else that is proper."

There was a moment's silence; then the exclamation, "Just look there!"

One of the hats was nodding on the box in a perilous manner.

"It is *only* James," said Lady Tyrrell; "as long as it is not the coachman, it matters the less. There's no danger."

"You will not keep him, though!"

"I don't know. He is much the best looking and handiest of the men; and your page, Master Joshua, is no great acquisition yet."

"I wish you would not call him mine; I wish you would send him back to his grandmother. I can't bear his being among those men."

"Very complimentary to my household! They are not a bit worse than the company he came from! You don't believe in rural simplicity, eh?"

"I believe that taking that boy from his home makes us responsible."

"And do I hinder you from catechising him to your heart's content? or sending him to the school of design?"

Again Eleonora was silent. Perhaps the balancing of the footman's head occupied her mind. At any rate, no more was said till the sisters had reached

their home. Then, at the last moment, when there was no time left for a reply, Eleonora cleared and steadied her voice, and said, "Camilla, understand two things for truth's sake. First, I mean what I say. Nothing shall ever induce me to marry a man who bets. Next, I never have forgotten Frank Charnock for one moment. If I have been cold and distant to him, it is because I will not draw him near me to be cruelly scorned and disappointed!"

"I don't mind the why, if the effect is the same," were Lady Tyrrell's last words, as the door opened.

Eleonora's little white feet sped quickly up the steps, and with a hasty good-night, she sped across the hall, but paused at the door. "Papa must not be disappointed," she whispered to herself, and dashed her hand over her eyes; and at the moment the lock turned, and a grey head appeared, with a mighty odour of smoke. "Ah! I thought my little Lena would not pass me by! Have you had a pleasant party, my dear? Was young Strangeways there?"

She had nestled in his arms, and hoped to avoid notice by keeping her head bent against him, as she hastily responded to his questions; but he detected something.

"Eh? Camilla been lecturing? Is that it? You've not been crying, little one? It is all right, you know! You and I were jolly enough at Rockpier; but it was time we were taken in hand, or you would have grown into a regular little nun, among all those black coats."

"I wish I were."

"Nonsense! You don't know life! You'll tell another story one of these days; and hark, childie, when you've married, and saved the old place, you'll keep the old room for the old man, and we'll have our own way again."

She could but kiss him, and hide her agitation in caresses, ere hurrying up the stairs she reached her own rooms, a single bed-chamber opening into a more spacious sitting-room, now partially lighted by the candles on the toilette-table within.

She flung herself down on a chair beyond the line of light, and panted out half aloud, "Oh! I am in the toils! Oh for help! Oh for advice! Oh! if I knew the right! Am I unfair? am I cold and hard and proud? Is she telling me true? No, I know she is not—not the whole truth, and I don't know what is left out, or what is false! And I'm as bad—making them think I give in and discard Frank! Oh! is that my pride—or that it is too bad to encourage him now I know more? He'll soon scorn me, and leave off—whatever he ever thought of me. She has taken me from all my friends—and she will take him away! No one is left me but Papa; and though she can't hurt his love, she has got his confidence away, and made him join against me! But that one thing I'll never, never do!"

She started up, and opened a locked purple photograph-album, with "In Memoriam" inscribed on it—

her hands trembling so that she could hardly turn the key. She turned to the likeness of a young man—a painful likeness of a handsome face, where the hard verities of sun-painting had refused to veil the haggard trace of early dissipation, though the eyes had still the fascinating smile that had made her brother Tom, with his flashes of fitful good-nature, the idol of his little sister's girlhood. The deadly shock of his sudden death had been her first sorrow; and those ghastly whispers which she had heard from the servants in the nursery, and had never forgotten, because of the hushed and mysterious manner, had but lately started into full force and meaning, on the tongues of the plain-spoken poor.

She gazed, and thought of the wrecked life that might have been so rich in joys; nay, her tenderness for her father could not hide from her how unlike his old age was from that of Mr. Bowater, or of any men who had done their service to their generation in all noble exertion. He had always indeed been her darling, her charge; but she had never known what it was to look up to him with the fervent belief and enthusiasm she had seen in other girls. To have him amused, loitering from reading-room to parade or billiard-room, had been all that she aspired to, and only lately had she unwillingly awakened to the sense how and why this was—and why the family were aliens in their ancestral home.

"And Camilla, who knew all—knew, and lived

through the full force of the blight and misery—would persuade me that it all means nothing, and is a mere amusing trifle! Trifle, indeed, that breaks hearts and leads to despair and self-destruction and dishonour! No, no, no—nothing shall lead me to a gamester though Frank may be lost to me! He will be! he will be! We deserve that he should be! I deserve it—if family sins fall on individuals—I deserve it! It is better for him—better—better. And yet, can he forget—any more than I—that sunny day—? Oh! was she luring him on false pretences? What shall I do? How will it be? Where is my counsellor? Emily, Emily, why did you die?"

Emily's portrait—calm, sweet, wasted, with grave trustful eyes—was in the next page. The lonely girl turned to it, and gazed, and drank in the soothing influence of the countenance that had never failed to reply with motherly aid and counsel. It rested the throbbing heart; and presently, with hands clasped and head bent, Eleonora Vivian knelt in the little light closet she had fitted as an oratory, and there poured out her perplexities and sorrows.

CHAPTER X.

A TRUANT.

" Since for your pleasure you came here,
You shall go back for mine."
Cowper.

" How like Dunstone you have made this room!" said Raymond, entering his wife's apartment with a compliment that he knew would be appreciated.

Cecil turned round from her piano, to smile and say, " I wish Papa could see it."

" I hope he will next spring; but he will hardly bring Mrs. Charnock home this winter. I am afraid you are a good deal alone here, Cecil. Is there no one you would like to ask?"

" The Venns," suggested Cecil; " only we do not like them to leave home when we are away; but perhaps they would come."

Raymond could not look as if the proposal were a very pleasing one. " Have you no young-lady friends?" he asked.

" We never thought it expedient to have intimacies in the neighbourhood." said Cecil.

"Well, we shall have Jenny Bowater here in a week or two."

"I thought she was your mother's friend."

"So she is. She is quite young enough to be yours."

"I do not see anything remarkable about her."

"No, I suppose there is not; but she is a very sensible superior person."

"Indeed! In that common-place family."

"Poor Jenny has had an episode that removes her from the common-place. Did you ever hear of poor Archie Douglas?"

"Was not he a good-for-nothing relation of your mother?"

"Not that exactly. He was the son of a good-for-nothing, I grant, whom a favourite cousin had unfortunately married, but he was an excellent fellow himself; and when his father died, she had Mrs. Douglas to live in that cottage by the Rectory, and sent the boy to school with us; then she got him into Proudfoot's office—the solicitor at Backsworth, agent for everybody's estates hereabouts. Well, there arose an attachment between him and Jenny; the Bowaters did not much like it, of course; but they are kind-hearted and good-natured, and gave consent, provided Archie got on in his profession. It was just at the time when poor Tom Vivian was exercising a great deal more influence than was good among the young men in the neighbourhood; and

George Proudfoot was rather a joke for imitating him in every respect—from the colour of his dog-cart to the curl of his dog's tail. I remember his laying a wager, and winning it too, that if he rode a donkey with his face to the tail, Proudfoot would do the same; but then, Vivian did everything with a grace and originality."

"Like his sister."

"And doubly dangerous. Everyone liked him, and we were all more together than was prudent. At last, two thousand pounds of my mother's money, which was passing through the Proudfoots' hands, disappeared; and at the same time poor Archie fled. No one who knew him could have any reasonable doubt that he did but bear the blame of someone else's guilt, most likely that of George Proudfoot; but he died a year or two back without a word, and no proof has ever been found; and alas! the week after Archie sailed, we saw his name in the list of sufferers in a vessel that was burnt. His mother happily had died before all this, but there were plenty to grieve bitterly for him; and poor Jenny has been the more like one of ourselves in consequence. He had left a note for Jenny, and she always trusted him; and we all of us believe that he was innocent."

"I can't think how a person can go about as usual or ever get over such a thing as that."

"Perhaps she hasn't," said Raymond, with a little colour on his brown cheek. "But I'm afraid I can't

make those visits with you to-day. I am wanted to see the plans for the new town-hall at Wilsbro'. Will you pick me up there?"

"There would be sure to be a dreadful long waiting, so I will go to luncheon at Sirenwood instead; Lady Tyrrell asked me to come over any day."

"Alone? I think you had better wait for me."

"I can take Frank."

"I should prefer a regular invitation to us both."

"She did not mean to make a formal affair."

"Forms are a protection, and I do not wish for an intimacy there, especially on Frank's account."

"It would be an excellent match for Frank."

"Indeed, no; the estate is terribly involved, and there are three daughters; besides which, the family would despise a younger son. An attachment could only lead to unhappiness now, besides the positive harm of unsettling him. His tutor tells me that as it is he is very uneasy about his examination—his mind is evidently preoccupied. No, no, Cecil, don't make the intercourse unnecessarily close. The Vivians have not behaved well to my mother, and it is not desirable to begin a renewal. But you shall not lose your ride, Cecil; I'll ask one of the boys to go with you to the Beeches, and perhaps I shall meet you there."

"He talks of my lonely life," said Cecil, to herself, "and yet he wants to keep me from the only person who really understands me, all for some rancorous old prejudice of Mrs. Poynsett's. It is very hard. There's

no one in the house to make a friend of—Rosamond, a mere garrison belle; and Anne, *bornée* and half a dissenter; and as soon as I try to make a friend, I am tyrannized over, and this Miss Bowater thrust on me."

She was pounding these sentiments into a sonata with great energy, when her door re-opened, and Raymond again appeared. "I am looking for two books of Mudie's. Do you know where they can be? I can't make up the number."

"They are here," said Cecil; "Lanfrey's *Vie de Napoleon;* but I have not finished them."

"The box should have gone ten days ago. My mother has nothing to read, and has been waiting all this time for the next part of *Middlemarch*," said Raymond.

"She said there was no hurry," murmured Cecil.

"No doubt she did; but we must not take advantage of her consideration. Reading is her one great resource, and we must so contrive that your studies shall not interfere with it."

He waited for some word of regret, but none came; and he was obliged to add, "I must deprive you of the books for the present, for she must not be kept waiting any longer; but I will see about getting them for you in some other way. I must take the box to the station in the dog-cart."

He went without a word from her. It was an entirely new light to her that her self-improvement could possibly be otherwise than the first object with

everyone. At home, father and mother told one another complacently what Cecil was reading, and never dreamt of obstructing the virtuous action. Were her studies to be sacrificed to an old woman's taste for novels?

Cecil had that pertinacity of nature that is stimulated to resistance by opposition; and she thought of the Egyptian campaign, and her desire to understand the siege of Acre. Then she recollected that Miss Vivian had spoken of reading the book, and this decided her. "I'll go to Sirenwood, look at it, and order it. No one can expect me to submit to have no friends abroad nor books at home. Besides, it is all some foolish old family feud; and what a noble thing it will be for my resolution and independence to force the two parties to heal the breach, and bridge it over by giving Miss Vivian to Frank."

In this mood she rang the bell, and ordered her horses; not however till she had reason to believe the dog-cart on the way down the avenue. As she came down in her habit, she was met by Frank, returning from his tutor.

"Have I made a mistake, Cecil? I thought we were to go out together this afternoon!"

"Yes; but Raymond was wanted at Willansborough, and I am going to lunch at Sirenwood. I want to borrow a book."

"Oh, very well, I'll come, if you don't mind. Sir Harry asked me to drop in and look at his dogs."

This was irresistible; and Frank decided on riding the groom's horse, and leaving him to conduct Anne to the rendezvous in the afternoon—for Charlie had been at Sandhurst for the last week—running in first to impart the change of scheme to her, as she was performing her daily task of reading to his mother.

He did so thus: "I say, Anne, Cecil wants to go to Sirenwood first to get a book, so Lee will bring you to meet us at the Beeches at 2.30."

"Are you going to luncheon at Sirenwood?" asked Mrs. Poynsett.

"Yes; Cecil wants to go," said the dutiful younger brother.

"I wish you would ask Cecil to come in. Raymond put himself into such a state of mind at finding me reading Madame de Sévigné, that I am afraid he carried off her books summarily, though I told him I was glad of a little space for my old favourites."

Cecil was, however, mounted by the time Frank came out, and they cantered away together, reaching the portico of Sirenwood in about twenty minutes.

Cecil had never been in the house before, having only left her card, though she had often met the sisters. She found herself in a carpeted hall, like a supplementary sitting-room, where two gentlemen had been leaning over the wide hearth. One, a handsome benignant-looking old man, with a ruddy face and abundant white whiskers, came forward with a hearty greeting. "Ah! young Mrs. Poynsett! Delighted

to see you!—Frank Charnock, you're come in good time; we are just going down to see the puppies before luncheon. Only I'll take Mrs. Poynsett to the ladies first. Duncombe, you don't know Mrs. Raymond Poynsett—one must not say senior bride, but the senior's bride. Is that right?"

"No, Papa," said a bright voice from the stairs, "you haven't it at all right; Mrs. Charnock Poynsett, if you please—isn't it?"

"I believe so," replied Cecil. "Charnock always seems my right name."

"And you have all the right to retain it that Mrs. Poynsett had to keep hers," said Lady Tyrrell, as they went up stairs to her bed-room. "How is she?"

"As usual, thank you; always on the sofa."

"But managing everything from it?"

"Oh, yes."

"Never was there such a set of devoted sons, models for the neighbourhood."

Cecil felt a sense of something chiming in with her sources of vexation, but she only answered, "They are passionately fond of her."

"Talk of despotism! Commend me to an invalid! Ah! how delightfully you contrive to keep your hair in order! I am always scolding Lenore for coming in dishevelled, and you look so fresh and compact! Here is my sanctum. You'll find Mrs. Duncombe there. She drove over in the drag with her husband

on their way to Backsworth. I am so glad you came, there is so much to talk over."

"If our gentlemen will give us time," said Mrs. Duncombe; "but I am afraid your senator will not be as much absorbed in the dogs as my captain."

"I did not come with my husband," said Cecil; "he is gone to Willansborough to meet the architect."

"Ah, about the new buildings. I do hope and trust the opportunity will not be wasted, and that the drainage will be provided for."

"You are longing to have a voice there," said Lady Tyrrell, laughing.

"I am. It is pre-eminently a woman's question, and this is a great opportunity. I shall talk to everyone. Little Pettitt, the hairdresser, has some ground there, and he is the most intelligent of the tradesmen. I gave him one of those excellent little hand-bills, put forth by the Social Science Committee, on sanitary arrangements. I thought of asking you to join us in ordering some down, and never letting a woman leave our work-room without one."

"You couldn't do better, I am sure," said Lady Tyrrell; "only, what's the use of preaching to the poor creatures to live in good houses, when their landlords won't build them, and they must live somewhere?"

"Make them coerce the landlords," said Mrs. Duncombe; "that's the only way. Upheave the masses from beneath."

"But that's an earthquake," said Cecil.

"Earthquakes are sometimes wholesome."

"But the process is not so agreeable that we had not rather avert it," said Lady Tyrrell.

"All ours at Dunstone are model cottages," said Cecil; "it is my father's great hobby."

"Squires' hobbies are generally like the silver trough the lady gave her sow," said Mrs. Duncombe; "they come before the poor are prepared, and with a spice of the autocrat."

"Come, I won't have you shock Mrs. Charnock Poynsett," said Lady Tyrrell. "You illogical woman! The poor are to demand better houses, and the squires are not to build them!"

"The poor are to be fitly housed, as a matter of right, and from their own sense of self-respect," returned Mrs. Duncombe; "not a few favourites, who will endure dictation, picked out for the model cottage. It is the hobby system against which I protest."

"Without quite knowing what was conveyed by it in this instance?" said Lady Tyrrell. "I am sure there is nothing I wish more than that we had any power of improvement of the cottages here; but influence is our only weapon."

"By-the-by, Mrs. Poynsett," continued Mrs. Duncombe, "will you give a hint to Mrs. Miles Charnock that it will never do to preach to the women at the working-room? I don't mean holding forth," she added, seeing Cecil's look of amazement; "but

improving the occasion, talking piously, giving tracts, and so forth."

"I thought you gave sanitary tracts!" said Lady Tyrrell.

"That is quite different."

"I doubt whether the women would see the distinction. A little book *is* a tract to them."

"I would abstain rather than let our work get a goody reputation for indoctrinating sectarianism. It would be all up with us; we might as well keep a charity school."

"I don't think the women dislike it," said Cecil.

"Most likely they think it the correct thing, the grain which they must swallow with our benefits; but for that very reason it injures the whole tone, and prevents them learning independence. Put it in that light; I know you can."

"I don't think Anne would understand," said Cecil, somewhat flattered.

"I doubt whether there are three women in the neighbourhood who would," said Lady Tyrrell.

"People always think charity—how I hate the word!—a means of forcing their own tenets down the throats of the poor," said Mrs. Duncombe. "And certainly this neighbourhood is as narrow as any I ever saw. Nobody but you and—shall I say the present company?—has any ideas. I wonder how they will receive Clio Tallboys and her husband?"

"Ah! you have not heard about them," said Lady Tyrrell. "Most delightful people, whom Mrs. Duncombe met on the Righi. He is a Cambridge professor."

"Taillebois—I don't remember the name," said Cecil, "and we know a great many Cambridge men. We went to a Commencement there."

"Oh, not Cambridge on the Cam! the American Cambridge," said Mrs. Duncombe. "He is a quiet, inoffensive man, great on political economy; but his wife is the character. Wonderfully brilliant and original, and such a lecturer!"

"Ladies' lectures *would* startle the natives," said Lady Tyrrell.

"Besides, the Town-hall is lacking," said Mrs. Duncombe; "but when the Tallboys come we might arrange a succession of *soirées*, where she might gather her audience."

"But where?" said Lady Tyrrell. "It would be great fun, and you might reckon on me; but where else? Mrs. Charnock Poynsett has to think of *la belle mère*."

"She has given up the management of all matters of society to me," said Cecil with dignity; "you may reckon on me."

"No hope of the Bowaters, of course," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"Miss Bowater is coming to stay with us," volunteered Cecil.

"To be near that unlucky Life Guardsman *manqué*," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"Come, I'll not have honest Herbert abused," said the other lady. "He is the only one of the Bowaters who has any go in him."

"More's the pity, if he can't use it. Is his sister coming to help the Reverend Julius to drill him?"

"On Mrs. Poynsett's account too, I fancy," said Lady Tyrrell; "Jenny Bowater is her amateur companion. Indeed, I believe it was no slight disappointment that her sons' appreciation did not quite reach the pitch of the mother's."

"Indeed!" asked Mrs. Duncombe; "I thought there had been a foolish affair with poor young Douglas."

"*Celà n'empêche pas.* By-the-by, have you finished Fleurange?"

"Oh, you are quite welcome to it. It is quite as goody as an English tale in one volume."

This opened the way to Cecil's desire to borrow Lanfrey, not concealing the reason why; and she was gratified by the full sympathy of both ladies, who invited her in self-defence to join in their subscription to Rolandi, to which she eagerly agreed, and would have paid her subscription at once if there had not been a term to be finished off first.

The gong summoned them to luncheon, and likewise brought down Miss Vivian, who shook hands rather stiffly, and wore a cold, grave manner that did not sit badly on her handsome classical features.

The countenance was very fine, but of the style to which early youth is less favourable than a more mature development; and she was less universally admired than was her sister. Her dress was a dark maroon merino, hanging in simple, long, straight folds, and there was as little distortion in her coiffure as the most moderate compliance with fashion permitted; and this, with a high-bred, distinguished deportment, gave an air almost of stern severity. This deepened rather than relaxed at the greeting from Frank—who, poor fellow! had an uncontrollably wistful eager look in his face, a sort of shy entreaty, and was under an incapacity of keeping up a conversation with anybody else, while trying to catch the least word of hers.

She, however, seemed to have more eyes and ears for her father than for anyone else, and he evidently viewed her as the darling and treasure of his life. His first question, after performing the duties of a host, was, "Well, my little Lenore, what have you been doing?"

"The old story, Papa," raising her clear, sweet voice to reach his rather deaf ears.

"Got on with your drawing?—The child is competing with a club, you must know."

"Not exactly, Papa: it is only a little society that was set on foot at Rockpier to help us to improve ourselves."

"What is your subject this month?" Frank asked.

"A branch of blackberries," she answered briefly.

"Ah!" said Lady Tyrrell, "I saw your pupil bringing in a delicious festoon—all black and red fruit and crimson and purple leaves. He is really a boy of taste; I think he will do you credit."

"The new Joshua Reynolds," said Frank, glad of an excuse to turn towards Eleonora. "Rosamond mentioned her discovery."

"You might have seen him just now figuring as Buttons," said Lady Tyrrell. "Degradation of art, is it not? But it was the only way to save it. Lenore is teaching him; and if his talent prove worth it we may do something with him. Anyway, the produce of native genius will be grand material for the bazaar."

"Card-board prettinesses!" said Mrs. Duncombe; "you'll spoil him with them; but that you'll do anyway—make him fit for nothing but a flunkey."

"Unappreciated zeal!" said Lady Tyrrell, glancing at her sister, who flushed a little, and looked the more grave.

"Eh, Lenore," said her father, "wasn't it to please you that Camilla made me take your pet to make havoc of my glasses?"

"You meant it so, dear Papa," said Eleonora, calling up a smile that satisfied the old gentleman. "It was very kind in you."

Fresh subjects were started, and on all the talk was lively and pleasant, and fascinated Cecil, not from any reminiscence of Dunstone—for indeed nothing could

be more unlike the tone that prevailed there; but because it was so different from that of Compton Poynsett, drifting on so unrestrainedly, and touching so lightly on all topics.

By the close of the meal, rain had set in, evidently for the afternoon. Frank offered to ride home, and lend the carriage for Cecil; but the Duncombes proposed to take her and drop her at home; and to this she consented, rather to Frank's dismay, as he thought of their coach appearing at his mother's door.

Lady Tyrrell took her up to resume her hat; and on the way, moved by distaste to her double surname, and drawn on by a fresh access of intimacy, she begged to be called Cecil—a privilege of which she had been chary even in her maiden days; but the caressing manner had won her heart, and spirit of opposition to the discouragement at home did the rest.

The request was reciprocated with that pensive look which was so touching. "I used to be Camilla to all the neighbourhood, and here I find myself—miles—no, leagues further off—banished to Siberia."

"How unjust and unkind!" cried Cecil.

"My dear, you have yet to learn the gentle uncharitableness of prejudice. It is the prevailing notion that my married life was a career of dissipation. Ah! if they only knew!"

"The drag is round," said Mrs. Duncombe's voice

at the door, in all its decisive abruptness, making both start.

"Just ready," called Lady Tyrrell; adding, in a lower tone, "Ah! she is startling, but she is genuine! And one must take new friends when the old are chilly. She is the only one—"

Cecil's kiss was more hearty than any she had given at Compton, and she descended; but just as she came to the door, and was only delaying while Frank and Captain Duncombe were discussing the merits of the four horses, the Compton carriage appeared in the approach, and Raymond's head within. Lady Tyrrell looked at Cecil, and saw it was safe to make a little gesture with the white skin of her fair brow, expressing unutterable things.

Mrs. Duncombe lost no time in asking if any steps were being taken for improving the drainage; to which Raymond replied, "No, that was not the business in hand. This was the architecture of the Town-hall."

"Splendour of municipality above, and fever festering below," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"Wilsborough is not unhealthy," said Raymond.

She laughed ironically.

"The corporation have been told that they have an opportunity," said Raymond; "but it takes long to prepare people's minds to believe in the expedience of such measures. If Whitlock could be elected mayor there would be some chance, but I am afraid they are sure to take Truelove; and as things are at

Wilsborough, we must move all at once or not at all. Individual attempts would do more harm than good."

"Ah! you fear for your seat!" said the plain-spoken lady.

Raymond only chose to answer by a laugh, and would not pursue the subject so treated. He was politeness itself to all; but he withstood Lady Tyrrell's earnest entreaties to come in and see some Florentine photographs, growing stiffer and graver each moment, while his wife waxed more wrathful at the treatment which she knew was wounding her friend, and began almost to glory in having incurred his displeasure herself. Indeed, this feeling caused the exchange of another kiss between the ladies before Sir Harry handed Cecil into the carriage, and Raymond took the yellow paper books that were held out to her.

Looking at the title as they drove off, he said quietly, "I did not mean to deprive you, Cecil; I had ordered Lanfrey from Bennet for you."

She was somewhat abashed, but was excited enough to answer, "Thank you. I am going to join Lady Tyrrell and Mrs. Duncombe in a subscription to Rolandi's."

He started, and after a pause of a few moments said gently, "Are you sure that Mr. and Mrs. Charnock would like to trust your choice of foreign books to Mrs. Duncombe?"

Taking no notice of the point of this question, she

replied, "If it is an object to exchange books at home faster than I can read them properly, I must look for a supply elsewhere."

"You had better subscribe alone," he replied, still without manifest provocation.

"That would be uncivil now."

"I take that upon myself."

Wherewith there came a silence; while Cecil swelled as she thought of the prejudice against her friend, and Raymond revolved all he had ever heard about creatures he knew so little as women, to enable him to guess how to deal with this one. How reprove so as not to make it worse? Ought not his silent displeasure to suffice? And in such musings the carriage reached home.

It had been an untoward day. He had been striving hard against the stream at Willansborough. The drainage was not only scouted as an absurd, unreasonable, and expensive fancy, but the architect whom he had recommended, in the hope that he would insist on ground-work which might bring on the improvement, had been rejected in favour of a kinsman of Mr. Briggs, the out-going mayor, a youth of the lower walk of the profession—not the scholar and gentleman he had desired, for the tradesman intellect fancied such a person would be expensive and unmanageable.

Twin plans for church and town-hall had been produced, which to Raymond's taste savoured of the gimcrack style, but which infinitely delighted all the

corporation; and where he was the only cultivated gentleman except the timid Vicar, his reasonings were all in vain. The plan was accepted for the town-hall, and the specifications were ordered to be made out for competition, and a rate decided on. The church was to wait for subscription and bazaar; the drains, for reason in Wilsbro', or for the hope of the mayoralty of Mr. Whitlock, a very intelligent and superior linendraper.

CHAPTER XI.

ROSAMOND'S APOLOGUE.

"Pray, sir, do you laugh at me?"
Title of Old Caricature.

WAS Cecil's allegiance to Dunstone, or was it to the heiress of Dunstone? Tests of allegiance consist in very small matters, and it is not always easy to see the turning-point. Now Cecil had always stood on a pinnacle at Dunstone, and she had found neither its claims nor her own recognized at Compton. One kind of allegiance would have remained on the level, and retained the same standard, whether accepted or not. Another would climb on any pinnacle that anyone would erect for the purpose, and become alienated from whatever interfered with such eminence.

So as nobody seemed so willing to own Cecil's claims to county supremacy as Lady Tyrrell, her bias was all towards Sirenwood; and whereas such practices as prevailed at Dunstone evidently were viewed as obsolete and narrow by these new friends, Cecil was willing to prove herself superior to them, and was

far more irritated than convinced when her husband appealed to her former habits.

The separation of the welfare of body and soul had never occurred to the beneficence of Dunstone, and it cost Cecil a qualm to accept it; but she could not be a goody in the eyes of Sirenwood; and besides, she was reading some contemporary literature, which made it plain that any religious instruction was a most unjustifiable interference with the great law, "Am I my brother's keeper?" and so, when she met Anne with a handful of texts neatly written out in printing letters, she administered her warning.

Cecil and Anne had become allies to a certain extent, chiefly through their joint disapproval of Rosamond, not to say of Julius; and the order was so amazing that Anne did not at first take it in; and when she understood that all mention of religion was forbidden, she said, "I do not think I ought to yield in this."

"Surely," said Cecil, "there is no connection between piety and cutting out."

"I don't know," said Anne; "but it does not seem to me to be right to go on with a work where my Master's Name is forbidden."

"Religion ought never to be obtruded," said Cecil.

"The Word ought to flavour everything, in season or out of season," said Anne thoughtfully.

"Oh! that's impossible. It's your narrow view. If

you thrust preaching into everything, we can never work together."

"Oh then," said Anne quickly, "I must give it up!" And she turned away with a rapid step, to carry her texts back to her room.

"Anne!" called Cecil, "I did not mean *that*."

Anne paused for a moment, looked over the baluster, and repeated firmly, "No, Cecil; it would be denying Christ to work where His Name is forbidden."

Perhaps there was something in the elevation and the carved rail that gave the idea of a pulpit, for Cecil felt as if she was being preached at, and turned her back, indignant and vexed at what she had by no means intended to incur—the loss of such a useful assistant as she found in Anne.

"Such nonsense!" she said to herself, as she crossed the hall alone, there meeting with Rosamond, equipped for the village. "Is not Anne going to-day?" she said, as she saw the pony-carriage at the door.

"No. It is so vexatious. She is so determined upon preaching to the women, that I have been obliged to put a stop to it."

"Indeed! I should not have thought it of poor Anne; but no one can tell what those semi-dissenters think right."

"When she declared she ought to do it in season or out of season, what was one to do?" said Cecil.

"I thought that was for clergymen," said

Rosamond, hitting the right nail on the head in her ignorance, as so often happened.

"She sees no difference," said Cecil. "Shall I drive you down?" she added graciously, according to the fashion of uniting with one sister-in-law against the other; and Rosamond not only accepted, but asked to be taken on to Willansborough, to buy a birthday present for her brother Terry, get stamps for an Indian letter, and perform a dozen more commissions that seemed to arise in her mind with the opportunity. Her two brothers were to spend the Christmas holidays with her, and she was in high spirits, and so communicative about them that she hardly observed how little interest Cecil took in Terry's achievements.

"Who is that?" she presently asked, "with those red-haired children? It looked like Miss Vivian's figure."

"I believe it was. Julius and I often see her walking about the lanes; but she passes like—like a fire-flaught, whatever that is—just bows, and hardly ever speaks."

"She is a strange girl," said Cecil. "Lady Tyrrell says she cannot draw her into any of her interests, but she will go her own way."

"Like poor Anne?"

"No, not out of mere moping and want of intellect, like Anne. But Lady Tyrrell says she feels for her; she was brought a great deal too forward, and was

made quite mistress of the house at Rockpier, being her father's darling and all, and now it is trying to her, though it is quite wholesome, to be in her proper place. It is a pity she is so bitter over it, and flies off her own way."

"That boy!" said Rosamond; "I hope she does something for his good."

"She teaches him, I believe; but there's another instance of her strange ways. She was absolutely vexed when Lady Tyrrell took him into the house, though he was her *protégé*, only because it was not done in *her* way. It is a great trial to Camilla."

"I could fancy a reason for that," said Rosamond. "Julius does not like the tone of the household at all." But she added hastily, "Who could those children be? They did not look *quite* like poor children."

"Ah! she is always taking up with some odd person in her own way," said Cecil. "But here we are. Will you drive on to the hotel, or get out here?"

When, at the end of two hours, the sisters-in-law met at the workroom, and Rosamond had taken a survey of the row of needle-women, coming up one by one to give their work, be paid and dismissed, there was a look of weariness and vexation on Cecil's face. She had found it less easy to keep order and hinder gossip, and had hardly known how to answer when that kind lady, Mrs. Miles Charnock, had been asked after; but she would have scorned to allow that

she had missed her assistant, and only politely asked how Rosamond had sped.

"Oh! excellently. People were so well advised as to be out, so I paid off all my calls."

"You did not return your calls without Julius?"

"There's nothing he hates so much. I would not have dragged him with me on any account."

"I think it is due to oneself."

"Ah! but then I don't care what is due to myself. I saw a friend of yours, Cecil."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Duncombe," said Rosamond. "I went to Pettitt's—the little perfumer, you know, that Julius did so much for at the fire; and there she was, leaning on the counter, haranguing him confidentially upon setting an example with sanatory measures."

"Sanitary," corrected Cecil; "*sanitas* is health, *sano* to cure. People never know the difference."

"Certainly I don't," said Rosamond. "It must be microscopic!"

"Only it shows the difference between culture and the reverse," said Cecil.

"Well, you know, I'm the reverse," said Rosamond, leaning sleepily back, and becoming silent; but Cecil was too anxious for intelligence to let her rest, and asked on what Mrs. Duncombe was saying.

"I am not quite sure—she was stirring up his public spirit, I think, about the drainage; and they were both of them deploring the slackness and insensibility

of the corporation, and canvassing for Mr. Whitlock, as I believe. It struck me as a funny subject for a lady, but I believe she does not stick at trifles."

"No real work can be carried out by those who do," said Cecil.

"Oh!" added Rosamond, "I met Mrs. and Miss Bowater, and they desired me to say that Jenny can't come till the dinner-party on the 20th, and then they will leave her."

"How cool to send a message instead of writing!"

"Oh! she has always been like one of themselves like a sister to them all."

"I can't bear that sort of people."

"What sort?"

"Who worm themselves in."

"Miss Bowater could have no occasion for worming. They must be quite on equal terms."

"At any rate, she was only engaged to their poor relation."

"What poor relation? Tell me! Who told you?"

"Raymond. It was a young attorney—a kind of cousin of the Poynsett side, named Douglas."

"What? There's a cross in the churchyard to Elizabeth Douglas, daughter of Francis Poynsett, and wife of James Douglas, and at the bottom another inscription to Archibald Douglas, her son, lost in the *Hippolyta*."

"Yes, that must be the man. He was flying from

England, having been suspected of some embezzlement."

"Indeed! And was Jenny engaged to him? Julius told me that Mrs. Douglas had been his mother's dearest friend, and that this Archie had been brought up with them, but he did not say any more."

"Perhaps he did not like having had a cousin in an attorney's office. I am sure I had no notion of such a thing."

Rosamond laughed till she was exhausted at the notion of Julius's sharing the fastidious objections she heard in Cecil's voice; and then, struck by the sadness of the story, she cried, "And that makes them all so fond of Miss Bowater. Poor girl, what must she not have gone through! And yet how cheerful she does look!"

"People say," proceeded Cecil, unable to resist the impulse to acquire a partaker in her half-jealous aversion, "that it was a great disappointment that Mrs. Poynsett could not make her sons like her as much as she did herself."

"Oh!" cried Rosamond; "how little peace we should have if we always heeded what people say!"

"People that know," persisted Cecil.

"Not very wise or very kind people to say so," quoth Rosamond; "though by the by, the intended sting is happily lost, considering that it lies among five."

"Why should you assume a sting?"

"Because I see you are stung, and want to sting me," said Rosamond; in so merry a tone, that the earnestness was disguised.

"I! I'm not stung! What Mrs. Poynsett or Miss Bowater may have schemed is nothing to me," said Cecil, with all her childish dignity.

"People talk of Irish imagination," said Rosamond in her lazy meditative tone.

"Well?" demanded Cecil sharply.

"Only it is not *my* Irish imagination that has devised this dreadful picture of the artful Jenny and Mrs. Poynsett spinning their toils to entrap the whole five brothers. Come, Cecil, take my advice, and put it out of your head. Suppose it were true, small blame to Mrs. Poynsett."

"What do you mean?" said Cecil in a voice of hurt dignity.

"I may mean myself." And Rosamond's peal of merry laughter was most amazing and inexplicable to her companion, who was not sure that she was not presuming to laugh at her.

There was a silence, broken at last by Rosamond. "Cecil, I have been tumbled about the world a good deal more than you have, and I never found that one got any good by disregarding the warnings of the natives. There's an immense deal in the cat and the cock."

"I do not understand," said Cecil.

Whereupon Rosamond, in a voice as if she were telling the story to a small child, began: "Once upon

a time there was a wee bit mousiekie, that lived in Giberatie O—that trotted out of her hole upon an exploring expedition. By and by she came scuttling back in a state of great trepidation—in fact, horribly nervous. 'Mother, mother!' said the little mouse, 'I've seen a hideous monster, with a red face, and a voice like a trumpet, and a pair of spurs.'"

"Of course, I know that," broke in Cecil.

"Ah, you haven't heard all. 'I should have died of terror,' said the little mouse, 'only that I saw a dear sweet graceful creature, with a lovely soft voice, and a smooth coat, and the most beautiful eyes, and the most exquisite pathetic expression in her smile; and she held out her velvet paw to me, and said "Dear little mousiekie-pousie, you're the loveliest creature I ever met, quite unappreciated in these parts. That horrid old cock is terribly vulgar and common-place; and never you believe your mother if she tells you he is better worth cultivating than one who has such a deep genuine love and appreciation of all the excellences of all mice, and of you in particular with your dun fur."'"

Rosamond could not for her very life help putting in that word *dun;* and Cecil, who had been driving straight on with her eyes fixed on her pony's ears, and rather a sullen expression of forced endurance, faced about. "What you mean by all this I don't know; but if you think it applies to me or my friends, you are much mistaken."

"I told you," said Rosamond, with the same languor, looking out under her half-shut eyes, "that I apply things to myself. I've met both sorts in my time."

And silence reigned for the rest of the way. Cecil had read many more books, knew much more, and was altogether a far more cultivated personage than the Lady Rosamond; but she was not half so ready in catching the import of spoken words; and all this time she was by no means certain whether all this meant warning or meant mockery, though either was equally impertinent, and must be met with the same lady-like indifference, which Cecil trusted that she had never transgressed.

Neither of them, nor indeed any other living creature, knew of a little episode, which had occurred about eighteen months previously, when Joanna Bowater had been taking care of Mrs. Poynsett during Raymond's first absence from home after her accident. Of course he took her back to Strawyers as soon as he arrived; and about half way, after a prolonged and unusual silence, he said, "Jenny, I believe we know one another's histories pretty well. It would be a great happiness and blessing if you could bring yourself to sink the past so far as to take me, and become indeed my mother's daughter. Do not answer me in haste. Think it over, and tell me if it is possible."

Jenny let him drive on more than a mile before she spoke; and when she did, the tears stood on her cheek, and it was quite an effort that her voice was

made steady. "No, Raymond, I am very sorry, but it will not do. Two griefs will not make one joy."

"Yes they would, to my mother."

"Ah! there it lies! Indeed, Raymond, I do feel for you all so much, especially your dear mother, that I would bring myself to it, if I could; but the very thought brings Archie up so vividly before me that I cannot! He has almost seemed to be sitting by me all this time. It seems as though beginning again would kill my right to think of him foremost of all."

"I could bear with that and trust to time," said Raymond. "Think it over, Jenny. I will be candid with you. The old delusion was too strong for any repetition of that kind, as you may see by the lame performance I am making now."

Jenny gave a little agitated laugh, and ejaculated, "Dear Raymond!" then added, "It is not on your account, but mine."

"But," he added, "my marriage is becoming a necessity, if only for my mother's sake; and you stand far before any other woman with me, if that would but satisfy you. I verily believe that in a short time we should be just as comfortable together as if we could start with more romance."

"I dare say we should, dear Raymond," said Jenny; "but I cannot feel that it is the right thing, while I have not *that* feeling for you which overpowers everything else, it seems to me that I ought not to give up

my place at home. Papa depends on me a good deal, and they both will want me more and more."

"Less than my mother."

"I don't know; and they are my first duty. I can always come to your mother when I am wanted, and I know in your secret soul you prefer me on those terms."

He made no answer, only when passing the lodge he said, "Will you consider it a little longer, Jenny?"

But this only resulted in a note:—

"DEAR RAYMOND,—Considering only shows me that I must be Archie Douglas's now and for ever. I can't help it. It is better for you; for you can find some young girl who can wake your heart again, as never could be done by your still affectionate

J. B."

Raymond and Jenny had met so often since, that the matter was entirely past, and no one ever guessed it.

At any rate, Rosamond, the most ready to plunge into counsel to Cecil, was the least likely to have it accepted; Rosamond had foibles of her own that Cecil knew of, and censured freely enough within herself.

That never-ending question, whether what became the colonel's daughter became the clergyman's wife, would crop up under endless forms. Rosamond, in all opinions, was good-natured and easy, and always for pardon and toleration to an extent that the Compton code could not understand. She could not bear that

anybody should be punished or shut out of anything; while there was no denying that, now the first novelty was passing, she was very lazy as to her parochial work, and that where her feelings were not stirred she was of little use.

Julius seemed shamefully tolerant of her omissions, and likewise of her eagerness for all gaieties. He would not go himself, would not accept a dinner invitation for any of the three busy nights of the week, and refused all those to dances and balls for himself, though he never hindered Rosamond's going.

She used absolutely to cry with passionate entreaties that he would relent and come with her, declaring that he was very unkind, he knew it took away all her pleasure—he was a tyrant, and wanted her not to go. And then he smiled, and owned that he hoped some day she would be tired of it; whereat she raged, and begged him to forbid her, if he really thought her whole life had been so shocking, declaring in the same breath that she would never disown her family, or cast a slur on her mother and sisters.

It always ended in her going, and though never again offending as by her bridal gown, she seldom failed to scandalize Cecil by an excess of talking and of waltzing, such as even Raymond regretted, and which disabled her for a whole day after from all but sofa, sleep, novels, and yawns.

Was this the person whose advice the discreet heiress of Dunstone was likely to follow?

It may be mentioned here, among other elements of difficulty, that Cecil's maid Grindstone was a thorough Dunstonite, who "kept herself to herself," was perfectly irreproachable, lived on terms of distant civility with the rest of the household, never complained, but constantly led her young mistress to understand that she was enduring much for her sake.

Cecil was too well trained, and so was she, for a word of gossip or censure to pass between them; but the influence was not the less strong.

CHAPTER XII.

PASTORAL VISITING.

"A finger's breadth at hand may mar
A world of light in heaven afar;
A mote eclipse a glorious star,
An eye-lid hide the sky."

Keble.

THE dinner was over, and Cecil was favouring the audience with a severely classical piece of music, when, under cover thereof, a low voice said to Julius, "Now, really and truly, tell me how he is getting on?"

"Really and truly, Jenny?"

"Well, not as you would tell mamma, for instance; but as you think in your secret soul."

"I am sorry you think me so duplex."

"Come, you understand how anxious I am about the boy."

"Exactly." And they both laughed.

"Is that all?" said Joanna Bowater.

"*Really and truly* it is! Rose can manage him much better than I can."

"He is very fond of her; but does he—is he—is his heart in his work?" asked the sister, looking with her honest eyes earnestly at Julius, her contemporary and playfellow as a child, and afterwards the companion with whom she had worked out many a deep problem, rendering mutual assistance that made each enter in no common degree into the inner thoughts of the other.

Julius smiled. "I doubt whether he has come to his heart yet."

"Why should he be so young? Think what you were at twenty-three?"

"I never had Herbert's *physique;* and that makes an immense difference. I had no taste or capacity for what is a great privation to a fine young fellow like him. Don't look startled! He attempts nothing unfitting; he is too good and dutiful, but—"

"Yes, I know what that *but* means."

"Nothing to be unhappy about. You know how blameless he has always been at Eton and Oxford; and though he may view his work rather in a schoolboy aspect, and me as a taskmaster, as long as he is doing right the growth is going on. Don't be unhappy, Jenny! His great clear young voice is delightful to hear; he is capital at choral practices, and is a hero to all the old women and boys, the more so for the qualities that earnestness cannot give, but rather detracts from."

"You mean that he is not in earnest?"

"Don't pervert all I say! He is not past the time of life when all appointed work seems a task, and any sort of excuse a valid cause against it; but he is conscientious, and always good-humoured under a scolding,—and Rosamond does not spare him," he added, laughing.

"Then you don't think there has been a mistake about him?" said Jenny, in a low voice of alarm.

"I have little doubt that when anything develops his inner life, so as to overcome the great strong animal that demands play and exercise, he will be a most useful clergyman."

"Perhaps he is too young, though I don't see how it could be helped. Papa always intended it, because of the living; and Herbert never wished anything else. I thought he really desired it, but now I don't know whether he did not only take it as a matter of course."

"Obedience is no unwholesome motive. As things stood, to delay his ordination would have been a stigma he did not deserve; and though he might have spent a year with advantage in a theological college, pupilage might only have prolonged his boyhood. It must be experience, not simply years of study, that deepens him."

"Ah, those studies!"

"To tell the truth, that's what I am most uneasy about. I take care he should have two hours every forenoon, and three evenings every week, free; but when a man is in his own neighbourhood, and so

popular, I am afraid he does not get many evenings at home; and I can't hinder Bindon from admonishing him."

"No," said the sister; "nothing will stir him till the examination is imminent; but I will try what I can do with him for the present. Here he comes, the dear old idle fellow!"

"Joanie, here you are at last, in conclave with the Rector. Lady Rose wants me to sing, and you must accompany me. No one is so jolly for picking one up."

"Picking one up" was apt to be needed by Herbert, who had a good ear and voice, but had always regarded it as "bosh" to cultivate them, except for the immediately practical purposes that had of late been forced on him. The choral society had improved him; but Jenny was taken aback by being called on to accompany him in *Mrs. Brown's Luggage;* and his father made his way up to him, saying, "Eh, Herbert! is that the last clerical fashion?"

"'Tis my Rectoress who sets me on, sir," was Herbert's merry answer, looking at her. "Now, Lady Rose, you'll keep me in countenance! My father has never heard you sing *Coming through the Rye.*"

"No, no, Herbert, my singing is only to amuse little boys. Here's the higher order of art!"

For Cecil was leading a young lady to the piano,

and looking as if she by no means approved of such folly, though everybody had listened to the *Poor Old Cockatoo*, laughed and applauded heartily; and the ensuing performance seemed to be unappreciated by anyone except Raymond and Cecil themselves.

Anne was sitting in a corner of the sofa, with a straight back and weary face, having been driven out into the throng by the old friends who came to sit with Mrs. Poynsett; but she brightened as Miss Bowater took a seat beside her, and accepted her inquiries for Captain Charnock far more graciously than the many which had preceded them. Was not her likeness in his album? And had he not spoken of her as one whom Anne would like?

Soon Joanna had led her to tell not only of Miles's last letter, but of those from Glen Fraser, of which she had spoken to no one, under the impression that nobody cared. She even spoke of the excellent farm and homestead which Mr. Van Dorp wanted to sell before going to the Free State, and which her father thought would exactly suit Miles.

"Does he mean to settle there?"

"Oh yes; he promised me to leave the navy and take me home as soon as this voyage is over," said Anne eagerly. "If the *Salamanca* only puts in for long enough, he might run up to Glen Fraser, and see Bocksfeld Stoop, and settle it all at once. I am sure he would be delighted with it, and it is only two
es from Mr. Pilgrim's."

"I'm afraid you can never feel this like home," said Jenny.

"Miles wanted me to know his family, and thought I should be useful to his mother," said Anne; "but she does not want anything I could do for her. If she has Raymond, she seems to need nobody else."

"And have you nothing to do?"

"I have letters to write to Miles and to them all at home; and I am making a whole set of shirts and stockings for Papa and the boys—it will spare Mamma and Jeanie, and I have plenty of time."

"Too much, I am afraid! But Herbert said you were very useful at the Work Society at Wilsbro'."

"Not now."

"Indeed!"

"No," in the old cold dry tone. But while Jenny was doubting whether to inquire further, innate sympathy conquered, and Anne added, "I wonder whether I did wrong!"

"As how?" asked Joanna kindly.

"They said"—she lowered her voice—"I must never speak on religious subjects."

"How do you mean? What had you done?"

"One day I found a woman crying because her husband had gone away to seek work, so I told her my husband was further away, and repeated the texts I like. She was so much comforted that I printed them on a card for her."

"Was that all?"

"No; there was another poor dear that was unhappy about her baby; and when I bade her pray for it, she did not know how, so I had to tell her a little. There is one who does know her Saviour, and I did love to have a few words of peace with her."

"And was that what was objected to?"

"Yes; they said it would change the whole character of the institution."

"Who did?"

"Cecil—Mrs. Charnock Poynsett. I think Lady Tyrrell and Mrs. Duncombe desired her. I thought it was no place for me where I might not speak one word for Christ, and I said so; but since I have wondered whether the old Adam did not speak in me, and I ought to have gone on."

"My wonder," said Jenny indignantly, "would be what right they had to stop you. This was private interference, not from the Vicar or the committee."

"But I am not a real visiting lady. I only go to help Cecil."

"I see; but why didn't you ask Julius what was right? He would have told you."

"Oh no, I could not."

"Why not?"

"It would seem like a complaint of Cecil. Besides——"

"Besides?"

"I don't think Julius is a Christian."

The startling announcement was made in so humble

and mournful a voice as almost to disarm Jenny's resentment; and before she had recovered enough for a reply, she was called to take leave of her parents.

Her brother was the professed object of her visit, and she was only at the Hall because there was no accommodation at his lodgings, so that she had no scruple in joining the early breakfast spread for the Rector and his wife, so as to have the morning free for him; but she found Julius alone, saying that his wife was tired after the party; and to Jenny's offer to take her class, he replied, "Thank you, it will be a great kindness if you will teach; but Rose has no regular class. Teaching is not much in her line; and it is a pity she should have to do it, but we have to make the most of the single hour they allow us for godliness."

"Don't you utilize Mrs. Charnock? or is she not strong enough for early hours?"

"Poor Anne! The truth is, I am afraid of her. I fancy all her doctrine comes out of the Westminster Catechism."

"Could Calvinism be put in at seven years old? Would not it be a pouring of stiff glue into a narrow-necked phial?"

"Result—*nil*."

"A few pure drops might get in—and you could give her books."

"It had struck me that it might be wholesome work for her; but the children's good must stand

first. And, timid and reserved as she seems, she insisted on preaching at the workroom, so that Cecil had to put a stop to it."

"Are you certain about that preaching?"

"Rose heard of it from Cecil herself."

"Did she ask what it amounted to?"

"I don't know; perhaps I had better find out. I remember it came after that ride to Sirenwood. By the by, Jenny, I wish Cecil could be hindered from throwing herself into that oak of Broceliande!"

"Are not you so suspicious that you see the waving arms and magic circles everywhere?"

"A friendship with anyone here is so unnatural, that I can't but think it a waving of hands boding no good. And there is worse than friendship in that quarter too."

"Oh, but Lenore is quite different!"

"A Vivienne still!" said Julius bitterly. "If she costs poor Frank nothing more than his appointment, it will be well."

"I don't understand!"

"She caught him in her toils two years ago at Rockpier; and now she is playing fast and loose with him —withdrawing, as I believe; and at any rate keeping the poor foolish boy in such an agitation, that he can't or won't settle to his reading; and Driver thinks he will break down."

"I can't think it of Lenore.—Oh! good morning, Raymond!"

"Good morning! May I come to breakfast number one? I have to go to Backsworth."

"Yes," said Jenny; "we told Papa it was too bad to put you on the Prison Committee. What does your wife say?"

"My wife has so many occupations, that she is very sufficient for herself," said Raymond. "I hope you will get on with her, Jenny. If she could only be got to think you intellectual!"

"Me? O Raymond! you've not been telling her so?" exclaimed Jenny, laughing heartily.

"A very superior coach in divinity, &c.," said Julius, in a tone half banter, half earnest.

But Jenny exclaimed in distress, "No, no, no; say nothing about that! It would never do for Herbert to have it known. Don't let him guess that you know."

"Quite right, Jenny; never fear," said Julius; "though it is tempting to ask you to take Frank in hand at the same time."

"Have you seen anything of the Vivians?" asked Raymond.

"Very little. I hoped to see something of Eleonora from hence."

"I can't understand that young lady," said Julius. "She was very friendly when first we met her; but now she seems absolutely repellent."

"*Tant mieux*," muttered Raymond.

"They seem inclined to take up all the good works

in hand," said Jenny. "By the by, what is all this story about Raymond affronting Wilsbro' by stirring up their gutters? Papa has been quite in a state of mind for fear they should take offence and bring in Mr. Moy."

"Julius only thinks I have not stirred the gutters enough," said Raymond. "And after all, it is not I, but Whitlock. I was in hopes that matters might have been properly looked after if Whitlock had been chosen mayor this year; but, somehow, a cry was got up that he was going to bring down a sanitary commission, and put the town to great expense; and actually, this town-council have been elected *because* they are opposed to drainage."

"And Truelove, the grocer, is mayor?"

"Yes; one of the most impracticable men I ever encountered. One can't get him so much as to understand anything. Now Briggs does understand, only he goes by £ *s. d.*"

"Posterity has done nothing for me, and I will do nothing for posterity, is his principle," said Julius. "Moreover, he is a Baptist."

"No chance for the Church in his time," said Jenny.

"There's the less harm in that," said Raymond, "that the plan is intolerable. Briggs's nephew took the plan of what he calls a German Rat-house, for the town-hall, made in gilt gingerbread; and then adapted the Church to a beautiful similarity. If that

could be staved off by waiting for the bazaar, or by any other means, there might be a chance of something better. So poor Fuller thinks, though he is not man enough to speak out at once."

"Then the bazaar is really fixed?"

"So far as the resolution goes of the lady population, though Julius is sanguine, and hopes to avert it. After all, I believe the greatest obstructive to improvement is Moy."

"Old Mr. Proudfoot's son-in-law?" said Jenny. "I know he has blossomed out in great splendour on our side of the county, and his daughter is the general wonder. Papa is always declaring he will set up in opposition to you."

"Not much fear of that," said Raymond. "But the man provokes me, he has so much apparent seriousness."

"Even to the persecution of Dr. Easterby," put in Julius. "And yet he is the great supporter of that abominable public-house in Water Lane, the Three Pigeons—which, unluckily, escaped the fire. He owns it, and all those miserable tenements beyond it, and nothing will move him an inch towards doing any good there!"

"I remember," said Jenny, "Papa came home very angry on the licensing day; the police had complained of the Three Pigeons, and the magistrates would have taken away the licence, but that Mr. Moy made such a personal matter of it."

"You don't mean that he is a magistrate!" exclaimed Julius.

"Yes," said Raymond. "He got the ear of the Lord-Lieutenant."

"And since he has lived at the Lawn, they have all quite set up for county people or anything you please," said Jenny, a little bitterly. "Mrs. Moy drives about with the most stylish pair of ponies; and as to Miss Gussie, she is making herself into a proverb! I can't bear them."

"Well done, Jenny!" exclaimed Julius.

"Perhaps it is wrong," said Jenny, in a low voice. "I dare say I am not just. You know I always did think Mr. Moy could have cleared Archie if he would," she added, with a slightly trembling tone.

"So did I," said Raymond. "I gave him the opportunity after George Proudfoot's death; but when the choice lay between two memories, one could hardly wonder if he preferred to shield his brother-in-law."

"Or himself!" said Jenny, under her breath.

"Come, Jenny," said Julius, feeling that the moment for interruption had come, "it is time we should be off. Methinks there are sounds as if the whole canine establishment at Mrs. Hornblower's were prancing up to meet us."

So it proved; and Jenny had to run the gauntlet through the ecstasies of all the dogs, whose ecclesiastical propriety was quite overthrown, for they danced

about her to the very threshold of the church, and had to have the door shut on their very noses. That drop of bitterness, which her sad brief story could not fail to have left in poor Joanna's heart, either passed out of mind in what followed, or was turned into the prayer, "And to turn their hearts;" and she was her bright self again for her promised assistance at the school.

Then Herbert's address was, "Come, Joan, I promised to take you to see the Reeves's pheasant at the Outwood Lodge. Such a jolly old woman!"

"The pheasant?"

"No; the keeper's mother. Tail a yard long! I don't see why we shouldn't turn them out at home. If father won't take it up, I shall write to Phil."

"Thank you, Herbs. Hadn't you better secure a little reading first? I could wait; I've got to write to Will."

"The post doesn't go till five."

"But I want to get it done. The mail goes to-morrow."

"You'll do it much better after a walk. I can't understand anything after the fumes of the school, unless I do a bit of visiting first; and that pheasant is a real stunner. It really is parish work, Jenny. Look here, this is what I'm reading her."

"*Learn to Die!*" said Jenny, laughing heartily. "Nothing could be more appropriate, only you should have begun before October."

"You choose to make fun of everything!" answered Herbert gruffly; and Jenny, deciding that she would see a specimen day, made her peace by consenting to share in the pastoral visit, whether to pheasant or peasant. Indeed, a walk with Herbert was one of the prime pleasures of her life—and this was delightful, along broad gravelled drives through the autumnal woods, with tinted beech-leaves above, and brackens of all shades of brown, green, and yellow beneath. And it was charming to see Herbert's ways with the old woman—a dainty old dame, such as is grown in the upper ranks of service, whom he treated with a hearty, bantering, coaxing manner, which she evidently enjoyed extremely. His reading, for he *did* come to more serious matters, was very good—in a voice that without effort reached deaf ears, and with feeling about it that did a great deal to reassure his sister that there was something behind the big bright boy.

But by the time he had done the honours of all the pheasants, and all the dogs, and all the ferrets, and all the stuffed birds, and all the eggs (for the keeper was a bit of a naturalist), and had discussed Mr. Frank's last day's shooting, it was so late, that Jenny had only just time to walk back to the Hall at her best pace, to see Mrs. Poynsett for a few minutes before luncheon; and her reception was, "Is that Herbert's step? Call him in, my dear!—You must make the most of your sister, Herbert. Come in to all meals while she is here."

He heard with gratitude—his sister with consternation. If forenoon pastoral visits were to be on that scale, and he dined out whenever he was not at school or at church, how would his books fare? and yet she could not grudge his pleasure. She could not help looking half foolish, half sad, when she met the Rector's eye.

Julius thought so much of her advice, as to knock at Cecil's sitting-room door, and beg to ask her a question; and as she liked to be consulted, she welcomed him hospitably into that temple, sacred to culture and to Dunstone—full of drawings, books, and china.

"I was thinking," he said, "of offering Anne some parish work. I wanted to know if you saw any objection?"

"Certainly not; I have not been able to make acquaintance yet with all our tenants, but they seem quite to understand the difference in our positions," said Cecil, with due deliberation.

Julius choked his amusement, and waived that point. "But did you not feel obliged to decline her services at the Wilsbro' workroom?"

"That was quite another thing. What was most undesirable in such an institution would be all very well for your old women."

"What kind of thing?"

"Talking piously, giving away texts, and so on; just the way to make the women think we intended

to impose religious instruction and give a sectarian character, defeating our own object."

"Was there any flaw in what she said?"

"I can't tell what she said. It was just a little murmur over the work."

"Not preaching?"

"Not in that sense," said Cecil, with a little compunction.

"I am glad to hear it; it makes a great difference."

"You see," said the lady, "our institution is merely intended to support these women in the time of want; and if we were to couple our assistance with religion we should just sink into a mothers' meeting, and make the women think——"

"Think that you prize the soul more than the body," said Julius, as she halted in search of a word. "I understand, Cecil; you would not be in the prevailing fashion. I don't want to argue that point, only to understand about Anne."

So saying, he went at once to Anne's abode, the old schoolroom, which, like everything else belonging to Mrs. Miles Charnock, had a sad-coloured aspect, although it had been fitted up very prettily. The light was sombre, and all the brighter pictures and ornaments seemed to have been effaced by a whole gallery of amateur photographs, in which the glories of the African bush were represented by brown masses of shade variegated by blotches of white.

Even in Miles's own portrait on the table, the gold seemed overwhelmed by the dark blue; and even as Julius entered, she shut it up in its brown case, as too sacred for even his brother's eyes.

However, a flush of pleasure came to her pale face at the invitation to take a class, and to read to a good old woman, whom in his secret soul he thought so nearly a dissenter, that she could not be made more so. She promised her help with some eagerness for as long as she should remain in England, and accepted the books he gave her without protest. Nay, that same evening, she took Jenny off into her grey abode, to consult her whether, since she must now join the early breakfast, she could go to daily service without becoming formal.

She even recurred to her question, whether Julius was a Christian, without nearly as much negation in her tones as before; and Jenny, taking it as it was meant, vouched for his piety, so as might render it a little more comprehensible to one matured on Scottish Calvinism and English Methodism, diluted in devout undogmatic minds, with no principle more developed than horror of Popery and of worldliness. Turned loose in solitude, reserve, and sadness, on her husband's family, who did nothing but shock her with manifestations of the latter, she could hardly turn even to the clerical portion of it, while Julius, as well as his curates, bore all the tokens by which she had been taught to know a Papist. Daily intercourse was

perhaps drawing her a little towards her brother-in-law; but Herbert Bowater united these obnoxious externals to a careless tongue, and joyous easy-going manner, and taste for amusement, which so horrified Anne, that she once condoled with his sister, and proposed to unite in prayer for his conversion; but this was more than Joanna could bear, and she cried, "I only wish I were as good a Christian as dear Herbert!"

For, indeed, the sister's heart intensely esteemed his sweetness, honesty, and simplicity, even while she found it an up-hill task to coax him to steady work. After that first morning he was indeed ashamed to let her see the proportion between his pastoral visits and his theological reading; but the newspapers (he had two or three weekly ones) had a curious facility of expansion, and there was a perilous sound in "I'll just see where the meet is,"—not that he had the most distant idea of repairing thither; it was pure filial interest in learning where his father and Edith would be.

Jenny could not tell whether her presence conduced to diligence or to chatter, but he minded her more than anyone else, and always stuck close to her, insisting on her admiring all his *protégés*. There was one with whom he was certainly doing a work, which, as Julius truly said, no one more clerical could have done so well—namely, the son of his landlady, a youth who held a small clerkship in an office at Willansborough, and who had fallen this year under

the attraction of the Backsworth races, so as to get into serious difficulties with his master, and narrowly escape dismissal for the sake of his mother.

The exceeding good nature and muscular Christian side of the lodger's character was having a most happy effect on the lad. He had set up a regular hero-worship, which Herbert encouraged by always calling for him when going to the choral practices, getting him into the choir, lending him books, and inviting him to read in his room in the evening. How much they played with the dogs was not known; but at any rate, Harry Hornblower was out of mischief, and his mother was so grateful to Mr. Bowater, that she even went the length of preferring his sermons to those of both his seniors.

The discovery that most vexed Jenny was that Sirenwood had so much of his time. He seemed to be asked to come to dinner whenever Sir Harry saw him, or a chair was left vacant at a party; and though his Rector was inexorable as to releasing him on casual notice from the parish avocations of three nights in the week, the effect was grumbling as savage as was possible from so good-humoured a being; and now and then a regular absence without leave, and a double growl at the consequent displeasure. It was true that in ten minutes he was as hearty and friendly as ever to his colleagues, but that might be only a proof of his disregard of their reproofs, and their small effect.

Eleonora Vivian was not the attraction. No; Herbert thought her a proud, silent, disagreeable girl, and could see no beauty in her; but he had a boy's passion for the matured splendour of her sister's beauty; and she was so kind to him!

What could Jenny mean by looking glum about it? She was stunningly good, and all that. She had done no end of good with clubs and mothers' meetings at her married home; and it was no end of a pity she was not in Compton parish, instead of under poor wretched old Fuller, whom you could not stir—no, not if you tied a fire-brand to his tail.

CHAPTER XIII.

WITHERED LEAVES AND FRESH BUDS.

LADY ROSAMOND and Joanna Bowater could not fail to be good friends; Herbert was a great bond of union, and so was Mrs. Poynsett. Rosamond found it hard to recover from the rejection of her scheme of the wheeled-chair, and begged Jenny to become its advocate; but Mrs. Poynsett listened with a smile of the unpromising kind—"You too, Jenny?"

"Why not, dear Mrs. Poynsett? How nice it would be to see you in your own corner again!"

"I don't think my own corner remains."

"Oh! but it could be restored at once."

"Do you think so? No, no, Jenny my dear; cracked china is better left on the shelf out of the way, even if it could bear the move, which it can't."

Then Jenny understood, and advised Rosamond to bide her time, and wait till the session of parliament, when the house would be quieter; and Rosamond nodded and held her peace.

The only person who held aloof was Cecil, who

would not rise to the bait when Raymond tried to exhibit Miss Bowater as a superior intellectual woman.

Unluckily, too, Jenny observed one evening at the five o'clock tea, "I hear that Mrs. Duncombe has picked up some very funny people—a lady lecturer, who is coming to set us all to rights."

"A wonderful pair, I hear!" said Frank. "Mrs. Clio Tallboys, she calls herself, and a poor little husband, whom she carries about to show the superiority of her sex."

"A Cambridge professor and a great political economist!" observed Cecil, in a low but indignant voice.

"The Yankee Cambridge!" quoth Frank.

"The American Cambridge is a distinguished university," returned Cecil.

"Cecil is right, Master Frank," laughed his mother; "Cam and Isis are not the only streams of learning in the world."

"I never heard of him," said Jenny; "he is a mere satellite to the great luminary."

"They are worth seeing," added Frank; "she is one of those regular American beauties one would pay to get a sight of."

"Where did you get all this information?" asked Cecil.

"From Duncombe himself. They met on the Righi; and nothing is more comical than to hear

him describe the ladies' fraternization over female doctors and lawyers, till they rushed into each other's arms, and the Clio promised to come down on a crusade and convert you all."

"There are two ways of telling a story," said Cecil.

"No wonder the gentlemen quake!" said Mrs. Poynsett.

"I don't," said Frank, boyishly.

"Because you've no wife to take you in hand," retorted Jenny.

"For my part," said Mrs. Poynsett, "I can't see what women want. I have always had as many rights as I could exercise."

"Ah! but we are not all ladies of the manor," said Jenny, "nor do we all drive coaches."

"I observe," said Cecil, with dignity, "that there is supposed to be a licence to laugh at Mrs. Duncombe and whatever she does."

"She would do better to mind her children," said Frank.

"Children! Has she children?" broke in Anne and Rosamond, both at once.

"Didn't you know it?" said Jenny.

"No, indeed! I didn't think her the sort of woman," said Rosamond. "What does she do with them?"

"Drops them in the gutter," said Frank. "Literally, as I came home, I heard a squeak, and found a child flat in a little water-course. I picked it out, and the elder one told me it was Ducky Duncombe, or some

such word. Its little boots had holes in them, Mother; its legs were purple, and there was a fine smart foreign woman flirting round the corner with young Hornblower."

"Boys with long red hair, and Highland dresses?" exclaimed Rosamond. "Yes, the same we saw with Miss Vivian!"

"Exactly!" said Frank eagerly. "She is quite a mother to those poor little wretches; they watch for her at the Sirenwood gate, and she walks with them. The boy's cry was not for mother or nurse, but for Lena!"

"Pray, did she come at his call?"

"No; but when I carried the brat home, poor Duncombe told me, almost with tears, how good she is to them. I fancy he feels their mother's neglect of them."

"I'm sure I gave her credit for having none," said Rosamond.

"Ah!" said Jenny, "you should have heard her condolences with my sister Mary on her last infliction. Fancy Mary's face!"

"No doubt it was to stem a torrent of nursery discussions," said Cecil. "Such bad taste!"

"Which?" murmured Rosamond under her breath, with an arched eye-brow.

"Plain enough," said Frank: "if a woman is a woman, the bad taste is to be ashamed of it."

"Yes," said Cecil, "that is the way with men;

they would fain keep us down to the level of the nursery."

"I thought nurseries were usually at the top of the house."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Poynsett, disregarding this mischievous suggestion, "they mean that organization, like charity, should begin at home."

"You say that meaningly," said Rosamond.

"I have heard very odd stories of domestic affairs at Aucuba Villa, and that she can't get a servant to stay there."

"That man, Alexander, has always been there," said Frank.

"Yes; but he has occasionally to do all the work of the house. Yes, I can't help it, Cecil, Susan will regale me with cook-stories sometimes; and I have heard of the whole establishment turning out on being required to eat funguses."

"I shall beware of dining there!" said Rosamond.

"Don't they dine here to-morrow?" asked Frank.

"No, they are engaged to the Moys," said Cecil.

"But the Vivians come?"

"Oh, yes."

Everyone knew that already; but Frank could not help having it repeated. It was a mere formal necessity to ask them, and had been accepted as such; but there was some amazement when Cecil brought home Lady Tyrrell and Miss Vivian to lunch and spend the afternoon. It might be intended as one of her

demonstrations; for though it was understood that any of the inmates were free to bring home friends to luncheon, it was not done—except with a casual gentleman—without notice to the mistress of the house. Cecil, however, comported herself entirely as in that position, explaining that Lady Tyrrell was come to give her advice upon an intended fernery, and would perform her toilette here, so as to have plenty of time. Frank, little knowing what was passing, was working the whole day at his tutor's for the closely imminent examination; Julius and Raymond were gravely polite; Eleonora very silent; and as soon as the meal was over, Rosamond declared that she should not come out to stand planning in the cold; and though Herbert would have liked nothing better in that company, his Rector carried him off to arrange an Advent service in a distant hamlet; Anne's horse came to the door; and only Joanna remained to accompany the gardening party, except that Raymond came out with them to mark the limits of permissible alteration.

"How unchanged!" exclaimed Lady Tyrrell. "Time stands still here; only where is the grand old magnolia? How sweet it used to be!"

"Killed by the frost," said Raymond, shortly, not choosing to undergo a course of reminiscences, and chafing his wife by his repressive manner towards her guest. When he had pointed out the bed of Americans that were to be her boundary, he excused

himself as having letters to finish; and as he went away, Cecil gave vent to her distaste to the old shrubs and borders, now, of course, at their worst—the azaleas mere dead branches, the roses with a few yellow night-capped buds still lingering, and fuchsias with a scanty bell or two.

Jenny fought for their spring beauty, all the more because Lady Tyrrell was encouraging the wife to criticise the very things she had tried to sentimentalize over with the husband; but seeing that she was only doing harm, she proposed a brisk walk to Eleonora, who gladly assented, though her sister made a protest about damp, and her being a bad walker. The last thing they heard was Cecil's sigh, "It is all so shut in, wherever there is level ground, that the bazaar would be impossible."

"I should hope so!" muttered Jenny.

"What do you mean to do about this bazaar?" asked Eleonora, as they sped away.

"I don't know. Those things so often go off in smoke, that I don't make up my mind till they become imminent."

"I am afraid this will go on," said Eleonora. "Camilla means it, and she always carries out her plans; I wish I saw the right line."

"About that?"

"About everything. It seems to me that there never was any one so cut off from help and advice as I am;" then, as Joanna made some mute sign of

sympathy, "I knew you would understand; I have been longing to be with you, for there has been no one to whom I could speak freely since I left Rockpier."

"And I have been longing to have you. Mamma would have asked you to stay with us before, only we had the house full. Can't you come now?"

"You will see that I shall not be allowed. It is of no use to think about it!" said the girl, with a sigh. "Here, let us get out of this broad path, or she may yet come after us—persuade Mrs. Charnock Poynsett it is too cold to stand about—anything to break up a *tête-à-tête*."

Jenny saw she really was in absolute fear of pursuit; but hardly yet understood the nervous haste to turn into a not very inviting side-path, veiled by the trees, whose wet leaves were falling.

"Do you mind the damp?" asked the girl anxiously.

"No, not at all; but——"

"You don't know what it is never to feel free, but be like a French girl, always watched—at least whenever I am with anyone I care to speak to."

"Are you quite sure it is not imagination?"

"O Joanna, don't be like all the rest, blinded by her! You knew her always!"

"Only from below. I am four years younger; you know dear Emily was my contemporary."

"Dear Emily! I miss her more now than even at Rockpier. But you, who were her friend, and knew

Camilla of old, I know you can help me as no one else can."

Jenny returned a caress; and Eleonora spoke on. "You know I was only eight years old when Camilla married, and I had scarcely seen her till she came to us at Rockpier, on Lord Tyrrell's death, and then she was most delightful. I thought her like mother and sister both in one, even more tender than dear Emily. How could I have thought so for a moment? But she enchanted everybody. Clergy, ladies, and all came under the spell; and I can't get advice from any of them—even from Miss Coles—you remember her?"

"Your governess? How nice she was!"

"Emily and I owed everything to her! She was as near being a mother to us as anyone could be; and Camilla could not say enough of gratitude, or shew esteem enough, and fascinated her like all the rest of us; but she never rested till she had got her off to a situation in Russia. I did not perceive the game at the time, but I see now how all the proposals for situations within reach of me were quashed."

"But you write to her?"

"Yes; but as soon as I shewed any of my troubles she reproved me for self-will and wanting to judge for myself, and not submit to my sister. That's the way with all at Rockpier. Camilla has gone about pitying me to them for having to give way to my married sister, but saying it was quite time that she took

charge of us; and on that notion they all wrote to me. Then she persuaded papa to go abroad; and I was delighted, little thinking she never meant me to go back again."

"Did she not?"

"Listen! I've heard her praise Rockpier and its church to the skies to one person—say Mr. Bindon. To another, such as our own Vicar, she says it was much too *ultra*, and she likes moderation; she tells your father that she wants to see Papa among his old friends; and to Mrs. Duncombe, I've heard her go as near the truth as is possible to her, and call it a wearisome place, with an atmosphere of incense, curates, and old maids, from whom she had carried me off before I grew fit for nothing else!"

"I dare say all these are true in turn, or seem so to her, or she would not say them before you."

"She has left off trying to gloss it over with me, except so far as it is part of her nature. She did at first, but she knows it is of no use now."

"Really, Lenore, you must be going too far."

"I have shocked you; but you can't conceive what it is to live with perpetual falsity. No, I can't use any other word. I am always mistrusting and being angered, and my senses of right and wrong get so confused, that it is like groping in a maze." Her eyes were full of tears, but she exclaimed, "Tell me, Joanna, was there ever anything between Camilla and Mr. Poynsett?"

"Why bring that up again now?"

"Why did it go off?" insisted Lenore.

"Because Mrs. Poynsett could not give up and turn into a dowager, as if she were not the mistress herself."

"Was that all?"

"So it was said."

"I want to get to the bottom of it. It was not because Lord Tyrrell came in the way."

"I am afraid they thought so here."

"Then," said Eleonora, in a hard, dry way, "I know the reason of our being brought back here, and of a good deal besides."

"My dear Lena, I am very sorry for you; but I think you had better keep this out of your mind, or you will fall into a hard, bitter, suspicious mood."

"That is the very thing. I am in a hard, bitter, suspicious mood, and I can't see how to keep out of it; I don't know when opposition is right and firm, and when it is only my own self-will."

"Would it not be a good thing to talk to Julius Charnock? You would not be betraying anything."

"No! I can't seem to make up to the good clergyman! Certainly not. Besides, I've heard Camilla talking to his wife!"

"Talking?"

"Admiring that dress, which she had been sneering at to your mother, don't you remember? It was one of her honey-cups with venom below—only happily,

Lady Rosamond saw through the flattery. I'm ashamed whenever I see her!"

"I don't think that need cut you off from Julius."

"Tell me *truly*," again broke in Lenore, "what Mrs. Poynsett really is. She is a standing proverb with us for tyranny over her sons; not with Camilla alone, but with Papa."

"See how they love her!" cried Jenny hotly.

"Camilla thinks that abject; but I can't forget how Frank talked of her in those happy Rockpier days."

"When you first knew him?" said Jenny.

They must have come at length to the real point, for Eleonora began at once—"Yes; he was with his sick friend, and we were so happy; and now he is being shamefully used, and I don't know what to do!"

"Indeed, Lenore," said Jenny, in her downright way, "I do not understand. You do not seem to care for him."

"Of course I am wrong," said the poor girl; "but I hoped I was doing the best thing for him." Then, as Jenny made an indignant sound, "See, Jenny, when he came to Rockpier, Camilla had been a widow about three months. She never had been very sad, for Lord Tyrrell had been quite imbecile for a year, poor man! And when Frank came, she could not make enough of him; and he and I both thought the two families had been devotedly fond of each other, and that she was only too glad to meet one of them."

"I suppose that was true."

"So do I, as things stood then. She meant Frank to be a sort of connecting link, against the time when she could come back here; but we, poor children, never thought of that, and went on together, not exactly saying anything, but quite understanding how much we cared. Indeed, I know Camilla impressed on him that, for his mother's sake, it must go no farther then, while he was still so young; and next came our journey on the Continent, ending in our coming back here last July."

Jenny remembered that Raymond's engagement had not been made known till August, and Frank had only returned from a grouse-shooting holiday a week or two before the arrival of the brides.

"Now," added Eleonora, "Camilla has made me understand that nothing will induce her to let Papa consent; and though I know he would, if he were left to himself, I also see how all this family must hate and loathe the connection."

"May I ask, has Frank ever spoken?"

"Oh no! I think he implied it all to Camilla when she bade him wait till our return, fancying, I suppose, that one could forget the other."

"But why does she seem so friendly with him?"

"It is her way; she can't be other than smooth and caressing, and likes to have young men about; and I try to be grave and distant, because—the sooner he is cured of me the better for him," she uttered, with a sob; "but when he is there, and I see those grieved

eyes of his, I can't keep it up! And Papa does like him! Oh! if Camilla would but leave us alone! See here, Jenny!" and she shewed, on her watch-chain, a bit of ruddy polished pebble. "Is it wrong to keep this? He and I found the stone in two halves, on the beach, the last day we were together, and had them set, pretending to one another it was only play. Sometimes I think I ought to send mine back; I know he has his, he let me see it one day. Do you think I ought to give it up?"

"Why should you?"

"Because then he would know that it must be all over."

"But *is* it all over? Within I mean?"

"Jenny, you know better!"

"Then, Lenore, if so, and it is only your sister who objects, not your father himself, ought you to torment poor Frank by acting indifference when you do not feel it?"

"Am I untrue? I never thought of that. I thought I should be sacrificing myself for his good!"

"His good? O Lenore, I believe it is the worst wrong a woman can do a man, to let him think he has wasted his heart upon her, and that she is trifling with him. You don't know what a bad effect this is having, even on his prospects. He cannot get his brain or spirits free to work for his examination."

"How hard it is to know what is right! Here have I been thinking that what made me so miserable must

be the best for him, and would it not make it all the worse to relax, and let him see?"

"I do not think so," returned Jenny. "His spirits would not be worn by doubt of *you*—the worst doubt of all; and he would feel that he had something to strive for."

Eleonora walked on for some steps in silence, then exclaimed, "Yes, but there's his family. It would only stir up trouble for them there. They can't approve of me."

"They don't know you. When they do, they will. Now they only see what looks like—forgive me, Lena—caprice and coquetry; they will know you in earnest, if you will let them."

"You don't mean that they know anything about it!" exclaimed Eleonora.

Jenny almost laughed. "Not know where poor Frank's heart is? You don't guess how those sons live with their mother!"

"I suppose I have forgotten what sincerity and openness are," said Eleonora sadly. "But is not she very much vexed?"

"She was vexed to find it had gone so deep with him," said Jenny; "but I know that you can earn her affection and trust by being staunch and true yourself—and it is worth having, Lena!"

For Jenny knew Eleonora of old, through Emily's letters, and had no doubt of her rectitude, constancy, and deep principle, though she was at the present

time petrified by constant antagonism to such untruthfulness as, where it cannot corrupt, almost always hardens those who come in contact with it. And this cruel idea of self-sacrifice was, no doubt, completing the indurating process.

Jenny knew the terrible responsibility of giving such advice. She had not done it lightly. She had been feeling for years past that "'Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all;" and she knew that uncertainty of the right to love and trust would have been a pang beyond all she had suffered. To give poor Eleonora, situated as she now was, admission to the free wholesome atmosphere of the Charnock family, was to her kind heart irresistible; and it was pleasant to feel the poor girl clinging to her, as people do to those who have given the very counsel the heart craved for.

It was twilight when the walk was over, and the drawing-room was empty; but Anne came to invite them to Mrs. Poynsett's tea, saying that Cecil had Lady Tyrrell in her own sitting-room. Perhaps Mrs. Poynsett had not realized who was Jenny's companion, for she seemed startled at their entrance; and Jenny said, "You remember Lenore Vivian?"

"I must have seen you as a child," said Mrs. Poynsett courteously. "You are very like your sister."

This, though usually a great compliment, disappointed Eleonora, as she answered, rather frigidly, "So people say."

"Have you walked far?"

"To the Outwood Lodge."

"To-day? Was it not very damp in the woods?"

"Oh no, delightful!"

"Lena and I are old friends," said Jenny; "too glad to meet to heed the damp."

Here Raymond entered, with the air of a man who had just locked up a heavy post-bag at the last possible moment; and he too was amazed, though he covered it by asking why the party was so small.

"Rosamond has gone to meet her husband, and Cecil has her guest in her own domains."

Then Jenny asked after his day's work—a county matter, interesting to all the magistracy, and their womankind in their degree; and Eleonora listened in silence, watching with quiet heedfulness Frank's mother and brother.

When Frank himself came in, his face was a perfect study; and the colour mantled in her cheeks, so that Jenny trusted that both were touched by the wonderful beauty that a little softness and timidity brought out on the features, usually so resolutely on guard. But when, in the later evening, Jenny crept in to her old friend, hoping to find that the impression had been favourable, she only heard, "Exactly like her sister, who always had the making of a fine countenance."

"The mask—yes, but Lena has the spirit behind

the mask. Poor girl! she is not at all happy in the atmosphere her sister has brought home."

"Then I wish they would marry her!"

"Won't you believe how truly nice and good she is?"

"That will not make up for the connection. My heart sank, Jenny, from the time I heard that those Vivians were coming back. I kept Frank away as long as I could—but there's no help for it. It seems the fate of my boys to be the prey of those sirens."

"Well, then, dear Mrs. Poynsett, do pray believe on my word, that Eleonora is a different creature!"

"Is there no hope of averting it? I thought Camilla would—poor Frank is such insignificant game!"

"And when it does come, don't be set against her, please, dear Mrs. Poynsett. Be as kind to her—as you were to me," whispered Jenny, nestling up, and hiding her face.

"My dear, but I knew you! You were no such case."

"Except that you all were horribly vexed with us, because we couldn't help liking each other," said Jenny.

"Ah! my poor child! I only wish you could have liked anyone else!"

"Do you?" said Jenny, looking up. "Oh no, you don't! You would not have me for your supplementary child, if I had," she added playfully; then

very low—"It is because the thought of dear Archie, even ending as it did, is my very heart's joy, that I want you to let them have theirs!"

And then came a break, which ended the pleading; and Jenny was obliged to leave Compton without much notion as to the effect of her advice, audacious as she knew it to have been.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEITHER LAND NOR WATER.

'A light that never was on sea or land."
Wordsworth.

NOTHING could be prettier than Rosamond's happiness in welcoming her school-boy brothers, and her gratitude to Mrs. Poynsett for inviting them, declaring that she liked boys. Her sons, however, dreaded the inroad of two wild Irish lads, and held council what covers and what horses could most safely be victimized to them, disregarding all testimony in their favour from interested parties. When, therefore, Terence and Thomas de Lancey made their appearance, and were walked in for exhibition by their proud and happy sister, there was some surprise at the sight of two peculiarly refined, quiet boys, with colourless complexions, soft, sleepy, long-lashed, liquid brown eyes, the lowest of full voices, and the gentlest of manners, as if nothing short of an explosion could rouse them.

And it was presently manifest that their sister had said rather too little than too much of Terry's abilities. Not only had he brought home a huge pile of

prizes, but no sooner was the *séance* after dinner broken up, than he detained Julius, saying, in a very meek and modest tone, "Rose says you know all the books in the library."

"Rose undertakes a great deal for me. What is this the prelude to?"

"I wanted to ask if I might just look at any book about the physical geography of Italy, or the History of Venice, or the Phœnicians."

"Why, Terry!"

"It is for the Prize Essay," explained the boy; "the subject is the effect of the physical configuration of a country upon the character of a nation."

Julius drew a long breath, astounded at the march of intellect since his time. "They don't expect such things of fellows like you!" he said.

"Only of the sixth, but the fifth may go in for it, and I want to get up to the Doctor himself; I thought, as I was coming to such a jolly library, I might try; and if I do pretty well, I shall be put up, if any more fellows leave. Do you think I may use the books? I'm librarian, so I know how to take care of them."

"You can be trusted for that, you book-worm," said Julius; "here's the library, but I fear I don't know much about those modern histories. My mother is a great reader, and will direct us. Let us come to her."

Quiet as Terry was, he was neither awkward nor

shy; and when Julius had explained his wishes, and Mrs. Poynsett had asked a few good-natured questions, she was charmed as well as surprised at the gentle yet eager modesty with which the low-pitched tones detailed the ideas already garnered up, and inquired for authorities, in which to trace them out, without the least notion of the remarkable powers he was evincing. She was delighted with the boy; Julius guided his researches; and he went off to bed as happy as a king, with his hands full of little dark tarnished French duodecimos, and with a ravenous appetite for the pasture ground he saw before him. Lower Canada had taught him French, and the stores he found were revelry to him.

Cecil's feelings may be better guessed than described when the return of Mudie's box was hastened that he might have Motley's *Dutch Republic.* She thought this studiousness mere affectation; but it was indisputable that Terry's soul was in books, and that he never was so happy as when turned loose into the library, dipping here and there, or with an elbow planted on either side of a folio.

Offers of gun or horse merely tormented him, and only his sister could drag him out by specious pleas of need, to help in those Christmas works, where she had much better assistance in Anne and the Curates—the one for clubs and coals, the other for decorations.

Mrs. Poynsett was Terry's best friend. He used

to come to her in the evening and discuss what he had been reading till she was almost as keen about his success as Frank's. He talked over his ambition, of getting a scholarship, becoming a fellow, and living for ever among the books, for which the scanty supply in his wandering boyhood had but whetted his fervour. He even confided to her what no one else knew but his sister Aileen, his epic in twenty-four books on Brian Boromhe and the Battle of Clontarf; and she was mother enough not to predict its inevitable fate, nor audibly to detect the unconscious plagiarisms, but to be a better listener than even Aileen, who never could be withheld from unfeeling laughter at the touching fate of the wounded warriors who were tied to stakes that they might die fighting.

Tom was a more ordinary youth, even more lazy and quiet in the house, though out of it he amazed Frank and Charlie by his dash, fire, and daring, and witched all the stable-world with noble horsemanship. Hunting was prevented, however, by a frost, which filled everyone with excitement as to the practicability of skating.

The most available water was a lake between Sirenwood and Compton; and here, like eagles to the slaughter, gathered, by a sort of instinct, the entire skating population of the neighbourhood on the first day that the ice was hard enough. Rosamond was there, of course, with both her brothers, whom she averred, by a bold figure of speech, to have skated

in Canada before they could walk. Anne was there, studying the new phenomena of ice and snow under good-natured Charlie's protection, learning the art with unexpected courage and dexterity. Cecil was there, but not shining so much, for her father had been always so nervous about his darling venturing on the ice, that she had no skill in the art; and as Raymond had been summoned to some political meeting, she had no special squire, as her young brother-in-law eluded the being enlisted in her service; and she began to decide that skating was irrational and unwomanly; although Lady Tyrrell had just arrived, and was having her skates put on; and Eleonora was only holding back because she was taking care of the two purple-legged, purple-faced, and purple-haired little Duncombes, whom she kept sliding in a corner, where they could hardly damage themselves or the ice.

Cecil had just thanked Colonel Ross for pushing her in a chair, and on his leaving her was deliberating whether to walk home with her dignity, or watch for some other cavalier, when the drag drew up on the road close by, and from it came Captain and Mrs. Duncombe, with two strangers, who were introduced to her as "Mrs. Tallboys and the Professor, just fetched from the station."

The former was exquisitely dressed in blue velvet and sealskin, and had the transparent complexion and delicate features of an American, with brilliant

eyes, and a look of much cleverness; her husband, small, sallow, and dark, and apparently out of health. "Are you leaving off skating, Cecil?" asked Mrs. Duncombe; "goodness me, I could go on into next year! But if you are wasting your privileges, bestow them on Mrs. Tallboys, for pity's sake. We came in hopes some good creature had a spare pair of skates. Gussie Moy offered, but hers were yards too long."

"I hope mine are not too small," said Cecil, not quite crediting that an American foot could be as small as that of a Charnock; but she found herself mistaken, they were a perfect fit; and as they were tried, there came a loud laugh, and she saw a tall girl standing by her, whom, in her round felt hat and thick rough coat with metal buttons, she had really taken for one of the Captain's male friends.

"I wouldn't have such small feet," she said; "I shouldn't feel secure of my understanding."

"Mrs. Tallboys would not change with you, Gussie," said Captain Duncombe. "I'd back her any day——"

"What odds will you take, Captain——"

But Mrs. Duncombe broke in. "Bless me, if there aren't those little dogs of mine! Lena Vivian does spoil them. Send them home, for pity's sake, Bob."

"Poor little kids, they are doing no harm."

"We shall have them tumbling in, and no end of a row! I can't stand a swarm of children after me, and they are making a perfect victim of Lena. Send them home, Bob, or I shall have to do it."

The Captain obeyed somewhat ruefully. "Come, my lads, Bessie says you must go home, and leave Miss Vivian in peace."

"O Bob, please let us stay; Lena is taking care of us——"

"Indeed I like nothing so well," protested Lenore; but the Captain murmured something about higher powers, and cheerfully saying he would give the boys a run, took each by an unwilling hand, and raced them into a state of frightened jollity by a short cut, by which he was able to dispose of them in the drag.

The Professor, meanwhile, devoted himself to Mrs. Charnock Poynsett, took her chair for a whirl on the ice; described American sleighing parties; talked of his tour in Europe. He was really a clever, observant man, and Cecil had not had anyone to talk of Italy to her for a long time past, and responded with all her full precision. The Professor might speak a little through his nose, but she had seldom met anyone more polite and accomplished.

Meantime, a quadrille was being got up. Such a performance and such partners had never been seen in light that shone on water or on land, being coupled by their dexterity in the art. They were led off by Mrs. Duncombe and the Reverend James Bindon. Mrs. Tallboys paired with Terry De Lancey, Lady Tyrrell with Herbert Bowater, Lady Rosamond with one of the officers. Tom was pounced on by the great

"Gussy Moy," who declared, to his bitter wrath, that she preferred little boys, turning her back on Mr. Strangeways and two or three more officers, as she saw them first solicitous to engage Eleonora Vivian—who, however, was to skate with Charlie.

A few wistful glances were cast towards the Wilsbro road, for Frank had been obliged by the cruel exigencies of the office to devote this magnificent frosty day to the last agonies of cram. This, however, had gone on better for the last fortnight—owing, perhaps, to some relaxation of Eleonora's stern guard over her countenance in their few meetings since Jenny's departure.

"And after all," as Charlie said, with the cheeriness of one who has passed his own ordeal, "a man who had taken such a degree as Frank could not depend on a few weeks of mere cramming."

Frank did come speedily up the road just as the quadrille was in full force; and perhaps the hindrance had stood him in good stead; for when the performance ceased in the twilight, and voices were eagerly talking of renewing it as a *fackel-tanz* in the later evening, and only yielding at the recollection of dinner engagements, it was not Charlie who was taking off Eleonora's skates; and when, after fixing grand plans for the morrow, Lady Tyrrell mounted her pony-carriage and looked for her sister, she heard that Miss Vivian was walking home.

Yes, Miss Vivian was walking home; and there was

a companion by her side feeling as if that dark, hard gravelled road were the pebbly beach of Rockpier.

"When do you go to London?" she asked.

"To-morrow afternoon. Wish me well through, Lenore."

"Indeed I do."

"Say it again, Lenore! Give me the elixir, that will give me power to conquer everything."

"Don't say such exaggerated things."

"Do you think it is possible to me to exaggerate what a word from you is to me?" said Frank, in a low voice of intense feeling.

"O Frank! it is wiser not to say such things."

"Wise! what is that to me? It is true, and you have known it—and why will you not allow that you do, as in those happy old days——"

"That's what makes me fear. It would be so much better for you if all this had never begun."

"It has begun, then!" murmured Frank, with joy and triumph in the sound. "As long as you allow that, it is enough for me."

"I must! It is true; and truth must be somewhere!" was whispered in a strange, low, resolute whisper.

"True! true that you can feel one particle of the intensity—Oh! what words can I find to make you understand the glow and tenderness the very thought of you has been!"

"Hush, hush!—pray, Frank. Now, if I do own it——"

"It—what? Let me hear! I'm very stupid, you know!" said Frank, in a voice of exulting comprehension, belying his alleged stupidity.

"What you have been to me——"

"Have been—eh?" said this cruel cross-examiner.

"Do not let us waste time," said Eleonora, in a trembling voice; "you know very well."

"Do I?"

"Now, Frank!"

"If you only knew what it would be worth to me to hear you say it!"

"I'm afraid it would be only worth pain and grief to you, and anger from every one," said she, in a low dejected voice, "far more than I am worth."

"You? Trust me to judge of that, Lenore. Would not you be worth all, and more than all, that flesh or spirit could feel! I could face it all for one look from you!" said Frank, with fervour from his heart of hearts.

"You make me more and more afraid. It is all too wretched to lead anyone into. Since I knew the whole truth, I have tried to spare you from it."

"That is why you have been so cold, and held so cruelly aloof all this time, so that if I had not caught one ray now and then, you would have broken my heart, Lenore; as it is, I've been wretched beyond description, hardly able to sleep by night or speak

rationally by day. How had you the heart to serve me so, like a stony Greek statue?"

"I thought it must be right. It seemed to break my own heart too."

"That's the woman's way of shewing a thing is right; but why I can't see. If you did hate me, it might be all very well to throw me over; but if not, why torture two as well as one? Are you afraid of my people? I'll manage them."

"You little know——"

"Know what?"

"All that made it cruel in Camilla to throw us together."

"Cruel! when it was the crowning joy of my past life, and is to be the crowning joy of the future?"

"How can it? Frank, you must know the causes your mother has for abhorring any connection with our unhappy family."

"My mother has too much sense to think a little extravagance among the men of a family can affect the daughters. I know the outer world is afraid of her, but she is the tenderest and most indulgent of mothers to us. No fear of her!"

"Ah! but that's not all."

"You mean that she has not taken much to your sister. I know; and I'm very sorry; but bring them together, and it would soon be got over. Besides, it is not your sister, but you. What do you mean?" rather disconcerted.

"Then you really did not know of the old engagement between Camilla and your eldest brother?"

"Oh, oh! So she consented once! Then she will do so again."

"Listen! Camilla broke it off because your mother could not resign her position to her."

He gave a whistle of dismay, then recovering himself with a laugh, said, "Fourth sons don't have such expectations founded on them. Don't fear, dearest; that can't be all the story, though no doubt it was part of it. My mother would rather go into a hermitage than stand in the way of Raymond's happiness. Some one must have made mischief."

"It was not all," said the girl; "it was Lord Tyrrell's coming in the way. Yes, my father told me so; he held it up to me as an example of what one ought to do for one's family."

"Then she was coerced?"

"I don't know; but such a marriage for me, with some one who would redeem the property, is their scheme for me. Even if your mother and brother could tolerate the thought of one of us, my poor dear father will never dare to consent as long as she is with him."

"Nay, Lenore; have I not often heard her say she prefers happiness to ambition? Whatever she may have done, she has come to think differently. She has well-nigh told me so."

"Yes, at Rockpier," sighed Eleonora. "Hark!"

The sound of the ponies' bells and hoofs was heard; Lenore put her hand on his arm, and drew him aside on the grass, behind a clump of trees, hushing him by a silent pressure as he tried to remonstrate. He clasped her hand, and felt her trembling till the tinkling and tramp were gone by.

"You frightened darling!" were his first words, when she let him speak. "Who would have thought you would be so shy? But we'll have it out, and——"

"It is not that," interrupted Lenore, "not maidenly shyness. That's for girls who are happy and secure. No; but I don't want to have it all overthrown at once—the first sweetness——"

"It can't be overthrown!" he said, holding arm and hand in the intense grasp.

"Not really, never; but there is no use in attempting anything till I am of age—next autumn, the 7th of November."

"Say nothing till then!" exclaimed Frank, in some consternation.

"We are only where we were before! We are sure of each other now. It will be only vexation and harass," said she, with the instinct of a persecuted creature.

"I couldn't," said Frank. "I could not keep it in with mother! It would not be right if I could, nor should I feel as if I were acting fairly by your father."

"You are right, Frank. Forgive me! You don't know what it is to have to be always saving one's truth only by silence. Speak when you think right."

"And I believe we shall find it far easier than you think. I'm not quite a beggar—except for you, my Lena. I should like to go home this minute, and tell Mother and Charlie and Rose, that I'm—I'm treading on air; but I should only be fallen upon for thinking of anything but my task-work. So I'll take a leaf out of your book, you cautious Lenore, and wait till I come down victorious, happy and glorious—and I shall now. I feel as if you had given me power to scale Olympus, now I know I may carry your heart with me. Do you remember this, Lena?" He guided her hand to the smooth pebble on his chain. She responded by putting her own into his.

"My talisman!" he said. "It has been my talisman of success many a time. I have laid my hand on it, and thought I was working for you. Mine! mine! mine! Waters cannot quench love—never fear."

"Hush!" as the light of the opening hall door was seen, and Lady Tyrrell's voice was heard, saying, "I thought we passed her; I am sure she was near."

Eleonora withdrew her arm, patted Frank back, waved him into silence, and went forward saying, "Here I am, Camilla; I walked home."

Her voice was calm and self-contained as ever—the unassailable dignity just as usual. The hall was full

of officers, standing about the fire and drinking tea, and Eleonora's well-worn armour was instantly on, as her sister asked where she had been, since others had walked home and had not overtaken her.

"I came by the lower road," said she.

"Indeed! I never saw you."

"I saw you pass—or rather heard you."

"And did not let me pick you up! Did you hide yourself?"

"It was much warmer to walk."

"So you seem to have found it, to judge by your cheeks," said Lady Tyrrell.

And Mr. Strangeways and one or two others could not restrain a murmured exclamation on the exceeding loveliness of that deepened colour and brightened eye; but Lenore only knew that an equally bright and keen eye was watching her heedfully, and knew that she was suspected, if not read through and through.

She mingled in the discussion of the skating, with those outward society-senses that she learnt to put on, and escaped as soon as possible to her own room.

Again she almost fell on the ground in her own little oratory chamber, in a tumult of gladness that was almost agony, and fear that was almost joy.

She wanted to give thanks that Frank had become so wholly and avowedly hers, and for that deep intense affection that had gone on, unfed, uncherished, for years; but the overflow of delight was checked

with foreboding—there was the instinctive terror of a basilisk eye gazing into her paradise of joy—the thanksgiving ran into a half-despairing deprecation.

And she knew that Frank was under Camilla's spell, and admired and trusted her still; nor had she been able to utter a word of caution to undeceive him. Should she have the power on the morrow? Camilla really loved skating, and surrounded as she was sure to be, there was hope of escaping her vigilant eye once more. To-morrow there would be another meeting with Frank! Perhaps another walk with him!

That anticipation was soothing enough to bring back the power of joyful gratitude, and therewith of hopeful prayer.

CHAPTER XV.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

"A lady a party of pleasure made,
And she planned her scheme full well,
And day and night the party filled
The head of the demoiselle."

Faber.

THOUGH Frank had no reason to expect that the tidings of his success would be hailed with much satisfaction at home, yet his habit of turning to his mother for sympathy would have been too much for his prudence, but for the fact that Terry De Lancey had dragged into her room a massive volume of prints from the Uffizi Gallery, and was looking it over with her, with a zest she had not seen since the days when her father gloried in his collection.

His victory could only be confided to Charlie, who might laugh, but fully appreciated the repose of mind with which he could now encounter the examiners, and promised to do his part to cover the meetings of the lovers the next day. But even then the chances of another performance on the lake, or of a walk

among the icicles afterwards, were departing. Thaw was setting in, and by breakfast-time there was a down-pouring rain. Frank lingered about Cecil in hopes of a message to serve as an excuse for a rush to Sirenwood; but she proved to be going to drive to the working-room, and then to lunch at Mrs. Duncombe's, to meet the Americans and the ladies from Sirenwood, according to a note sent over in early morning at first sight of the wet.

Thereupon Frank found he had a last reference to make to his tutor, and begged for a lift. A touch of warmth in Cecil would have opened the flood-gates of his confidence, but she was exercised about a mistake in the accounts, and claimed his aid in tracking a defective seven-pence. When she heard him utter the monstrous statement that a hundred and five farthings were almost nine shillings, she looked at him with withering compassion, as sure to fail, and a small loss to Her Majesty; nor would she listen to any of his hints that he was very curious to see her working-room.

His question to the tutor judiciously lasted till twelve, when he dropped in to consult Captain Duncombe about horse-hire in London; and that gentleman, who had been undergoing a course of political economy all the morning, eagerly pounced on him for a tour of his stables, which lasted till luncheon was due, and he could casually enter the dining-room, where Lady Tyrrell held out her hand good-naturedly

to him, laughing at the blankness he could not entirely conceal. "Only me!" she said. "It can't be helped! Poor Lenore caught such a dreadful sore throat last night, that I have shut her up in her room with a mustard poultice."

"Indeed! I am very sorry."

"You may well look horrified! You were the guilty party, I suspect. Taking her all across the dark under those dank trees!"

He coloured up to the eyes, little expecting to be thus convicted; but Mrs. Duncombe came to his aid. "My impartiality would impute the damage to her standing about with those wretched little dogs of mine."

"It is your climate," said Mrs. Tallboys. "In our dry atmosphere there would be no risk with a far lower temperature."

"I hope it is nothing serious," said Frank anxiously.

"I hope so too," said Lady Tyrrell, looking archly into his face, which had not learnt such impenetrability as poor Lenore's.

"No; but really?" he said, in anxiety that would not be rallied away.

"This is the way," said Lady Tyrrell. "Young gentlemen persuade young ladies to do the most imprudent things—saunter about in the cold after skating, and dawdle under trees, and then wonder when they catch cold.—Do they do such things in your

country, Mrs. Tallboys, and expect the mammas and elder sisters to be gratified?"

"Mammas and elder sisters are at a discount with you, are not they?" said Mrs. Duncombe.

"Our young women are sufficient to protect themselves without our shewing tacit distrust, and encumbering them with guardianship," returned the Professor.

"Mr. Charnock wishes we had reached that point," said Lady Tyrrell.

She had put him completely out of countenance. He had not supposed her aware of his having been Lenore's companion, and was not certain whether her sister had not after all confided in her, or if he himself had not been an unconscious victim. The public banter jarred upon him; and while Cecil was making inquiries into the extent of the young ladies' privileges in America, he was mentally calculating the possibilities of rushing up to Sirenwood, trying to see Lenore in spite of her throat, and ascertaining her position, before his train was due; but he was forced to resign the notion, for Raymond had made an appointment for him in London which must not be missed; and before luncheon was over the dogcart, according to agreement with Charlie, called for him.

"Good-bye, Mr. Frank," said Mrs. Duncombe; "will you have an old shoe thrown after you for luck?"

"The time is not come for that yet," said Cecil, gravely.

"Tending in that direction. Eh, Charnock?" said the Captain. "Here's to your success—now, and in what's to come!"

"Thank you, Captain," said Frank, shaking his hand, liking the hearty voice. "Lady Tyrrell, won't you give me your good wishes?" he asked half diffidently.

"For the examination—yes, certainly," she replied. "It is safer not to look too far into your wishing-well."

"And—and will you give my—my best regards to Le—to Miss Vivian, and say I grieve for her cold, and trust to her—to her good wishes—" he uttered, quick and fast, holding her hand all the time.

"Yes, yes," she said quickly; "but last messages won't do when trains are due."

"Not due yet," said Frank; "but I must go home. I've not seen my mother to-day, and I shall not have a moment.—Good-bye, Cecil; have you any commands for Raymond?"

"No, thank you," said Cecil, gravely; and with a bow to the Americans, he was gone.

"That is one of your products of the highest English refinement?" said Mrs. Tallboys, whom in his pre-occupation he had scarcely noticed.

"How does he strike you?" said Cecil. "He is my brother-in-law, but never mind that."

"He looks fitted for the hero of a vapid English novel. I long to force him to rough it, and to rub off that exquisite do-nothing air. It irritates me!"

"Frank Charnock has done a good deal of hard work, and is not to lead the life of an idle man," said Captain Duncombe. "I know I should not like to be in his shoes if he succeeds—grinding away in an office ten months out of the twelve."

"In an office! I should like to set him to work with an axe!"

"Well, those dainty-looking curled darlings don't do badly in the backwoods," said Lady Tyrrell.

"Ah! I understand! You stand up for him because there's a little *tendresse* for your sister," said the plain-spoken American.

"Poor fellow! I am afraid he is far gone. It is an impossible thing, though, and the sooner he can be cured of it the better," said Lady Tyrrell. "I am sorry that walk took place yesterday.—Did he mention it at home, Cecil?"

"You are a very inconsistent woman, Lady Tyrrell," broke in Mrs. Duncombe in her abrupt way. "Here you are come to uphold the emancipation of woman, and yet, when we come to your own sister taking one poor walk——"

"I beg your pardon, Bessie," said Lady Tyrrell, with her most courteous manner. "I never said I was come to uphold the emancipation of woman; only to

subject myself to Mrs. Tallboys' influence—she has to make a convert of me."

For, of course, Lady Tyrrell was only drawn into the controversy as a matter of amusement, and possibly as something specially distasteful to the house of Charnock Poynsett; and Cecil was a good deal influenced by the fascination of her example, as well as by the eagerness of Mrs. Duncombe and the charms of the Americans; and above all, they conspired in making her feel herself important, and assuming that she must be foremost in all that was done. She did not controvert the doctrines of Dunstone so entirely as to embrace the doctrines of emancipation, but she thought that free ventilation was due to every subject, most especially when the Member's wife was the leading lady in bringing about such discussion. The opposition made in the town to Mrs. Duncombe's sanitary plans, and the contempt with which they had been treated as ladies' fancies, had given a positive field of battle, with that admixture of right and wrong on either side which is essential to championship. And in truth Cecil was so much more under the influence of Camilla Tyrrell and Bessie Duncombe than under that of any other person, that she was ready to espouse any cause that they did.

How to arrange for the intended instruction was the difficulty, since Wilsbro' was without a town-hall, and, moreover, the inhabitants were averse to all

varieties of change, either as to the claims of women, the inequality of social laws, the improvement of education, or the comprehension of social science—the regular course which Mrs. Clio W. Tallboys was wont to lecture.

The matter could only be managed by arranging a series of *soirées* at different houses. Mrs. Duncombe's rooms were far too small; but if some person of more note—"some swell" as she said—would make the beginning, there would be no difficulty in bringing others to follow suit.

"You must do it, Lady Tyrrell," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"I! If there's nobody else; but it would come much better from another quarter," nodding at Cecil.

"Don't you wish you may get it?" muttered the slang-loving Bessie.

"That's one point in which we leave you far behind," said Mrs. Tallboys. "We issue our invitations quite independently of the other members of the household. Each has a separate visiting list."

"There need be no difficulty," said Cecil; "all matters of visiting are in my hands. It is necessary in our position; and if Lady Tyrrell thinks it proper that I should give the first party, I will do so."

"Bravo, what fun!" cried Mrs. Duncombe, clapping her hands. "You won't get into a jolly row, though?" she added, anxiously.

"I am perfectly sure of my ground," said Cecil, with the dignity of one to whom "a row" was unheard of. "It is the simple duty of a Member to come forward in promoting free discussion of opinions."

"You are a public-spirited woman, Cecil," said Lady Tyrrell. "When you have made the first move, I'll follow. Then whom shall we ask next?"

"Mrs. Moy," said Bessie. "She is a nonentity herself, but if Gussie were to be strongly bitten she could do more than any one else, and make her father reform that nest of horrors in Water Lane!"

"I'm afraid the freedom side will bite her more than the sanitary side," said Lady Tyrrell.

"She is capital fun, though, and a great ally of ours," said Mrs. Duncombe; "and the rooms at Proudfoot Lawn are worth anything!"

Other details were fixed, even to the day of Cecil's opening party, which must take place on the first practicable day; but there was none to be found till the Wednesday week, the day before Raymond would return home. Cecil did not recollect this till the day had been unanimously agreed on, and it was with a little alarm; but after what she had asserted about her freedom of action, she could not retract before the eyes of the American lady; and, as she said to herself, she could receive her own ladies' party, without interfering with anyone else, in the library, so that no one had a right to object. However, she had a certain

anticipation of opposition, which caused her to act before announcing her intention; and thus it was that Rosamond found her dropping a number of notes through the slit in the lid of the post-box. "Another dinner?" was the question.

"No, this is a *soirée* in the library, entirely for ladies; Mrs. Tallboys is to explain her views in the evenings at the principal houses in the neighbourhood. She will begin here on Wednesday week."

"Why, that's before Raymond comes back!"

"This is entirely for women."

"Women! women's rights! How have you got Mrs. Poynsett to consent?"

"I have *carte blanche* in these matters."

"Do you mean that you have not consulted her? Does Raymond know? Oh! Yes, I see I have no right to ask; but, Cecil, for your own sake, I entreat you to consider what you are about, before running into such a frightful scrape!" and Rosamond impulsively caught the hand that was still putting in a letter; but Cecil stood still, not withdrawing or moving a muscle, perfectly impassive. Rosamond went on more eagerly, "Oh yes, I know you don't like me—I'm only a poor battered soldier's daughter, quite an unworthy associate for a Charnock of the Charnocks; but I can't help begging you to consider the consequences of sending out invitations to hear this strange woman hold forth in Mrs. Poynsett's own house, in your husband's absence."

"Thank you for your solicitude," said Cecil, dropping in her envelope the instant the obstructive hand was removed, and going on her way with dignified self-possession; while Rosamond, in a tumult of indignation, which made her scarcely comprehensible, rushed up to her husband at his writing, and poured out her story.

Clio advocating female supremacy in Mrs. Poynsett's own house, without notice to her! Should she be warned in time to stop the letters? Should Raymond be written to? Rosamond was for both, Julius for neither. He said that either way would begin a system that could never be forgiven; and that they had better consider themselves as practically at the Rectory, and not interfere.

"How can you be so cold-blooded?" cried she.

"I do not want to do worse harm. My mother will learn what is to happen sooner or later; and then she can put a stop to it in any way she chooses."

"I wish she would send in Mrs. Crabtree with her tawse!" said Rosamond. "But is it right by Raymond to let his wife bring this Yankee muse to talk her nonsense in his very rooms?"

"You have argued with her?"

"Or with a block—a stock—a stone!" raved Rosamond.

"Then depend upon it, to inform against her would be far worse than letting any amount of absurdity be

talked. I should like to know how you would get over being so served!"

"Don't make comparisons, sir! Poor things! they would not be the worse for a little of our foolishness!"

Things settled themselves according to Julius's prediction; for Mr. Bowater, coming up with his son Herbert to see his old friend, said, "What grand doings are you having here? What is Raymond's wife up to? Ladies' *conversazione*—that's a new thing in these parts!"

"I gave such matters up to her," said Mrs. Poynsett. "Young people like a little freedom of action; and there are changes in the neighbourhood since I was laid up." It was a temporizing speech, to avoid shewing her total ignorance.

Mr. Bowater cleared his throat. "Young folk may like freedom of action, but it don't always follow that it is good for them. I hope she won't get Raymond into a scrape, that's all—committing him and herself to a course of lectures by that Yankee woman on woman's rights."

"It does not commit him; it is before he comes home, on Wednesday," said Herbert.

"Never mind that; what a woman does her husband does. Look here, Mrs. Poynsett, I brought over Jenny's note in my pocket; see, here are two—one to accept, and one to refuse, just as you choose."

"Oh! accept, by all means," cried Mrs. Poynsett; "don't leave the wrong one!"

Then she changed the conversation so decidedly, that Mr. Bowater could not resume his warning; but after taking leave of her, he met Rosamond in the avenue, and could not help saying, "Pray, was my old friend aware of Mrs. Raymond's doings?"

"Have you told her? Oh! I am so glad!"

"Then it is as you said, Herbert. Mrs. Raymond had left her in ignorance! The impudent baggage! That's what the world is coming to!"

"But what regular game Mrs. Poynsett was!" said Herbert. "You could not make out in the least that she had been left in the lurch; and I'm sure she has a plan, by the way in which she desired Jenny and Edie to come."

"Only make her understand that the Wilsbro' folks are in a ticklish state," said Mr. Bowater; "they are sulking already, because they say the ladies have been stirring him up to put them to expense about the drains."

"Wilsbro' isn't sweet," said Herbert.

"There's been nothing amiss in my time," returned his father. "Perfectly healthy in all reason! Ay! you may laugh, young folks, but I never heard of any receipt to hinder people from dying; and let well alone is a safe maxim."

"If it be well," said Rosamond. "However, Raymond says whatever is done must be by general consent, and that small private attempts will do more harm than good."

"He had better take care what he says. If they fancy he is in league with that ridiculous Duncombe woman against their pockets, Moy is on the watch to take advantage of it; and all the old family interest will not save his seat."

When Rosamond reached home she found Anne beside her mother-in-law, provided with a quire of note-paper and pile of envelopes. "My dear, I want your help," she said. "Till my accident I always had a children's party at Christmas; and now I have so many young people to manage it for me, I think we might try again, and combine it with Cecil's ladies' party, on Wednesday."

"Hurrah!" cried Rosamond. "You mean that we should have plenty of fun—and, in fact, drum out the rights of woman."

"At any rate, present a counter-attraction. You and Charlie and your brothers, with the Bowaters, might do something?"

"Trust me!" cried Rosamond. "Oh! I am so thankful to Mr. Bowater. Julius and I had our blood boiling; and I said as much or more to Cecil than woman could, but she minded me no more than the old white cockatoo; and Julius said our telling would only make more mischief."

"He was quite right," said his mother. "Let there not be one word of opposition, you know; only swamp it. You could get up some charades, and have something going on all the evening."

"Trust me for that! Oh! if my darling Aileen were but here! But Tom is the very model of an actor, and Terry is grand, if only we can keep him out of the high tragedy line. King Lear is the mildest thing he condescends to!"

"Could you manage a Christmas-tree? The taking up a room beforehand is inconvenient; but I should like to offer some little substantial bait, even to the grown-up;" and her eyes twinkled merrily.

"I know a better thing," said Rosamond; "an enchanted grove with a beneficent witch. We did it at St. Awdry's, with bon-bons and trumpery, in a little conservatory, hardly large enough to turn round in. If I may have the key of the conservatory, I'll manage."

"You shall have what you please; and perhaps you would kindly go and choose the things at Backsworth. There is a very good fancy shop there."

"Thank you, thank you! How sweet!—Now, Anne, you will see what you shall see!"

"Is there to be dancing?" asked Anne, humbly yet resolutely.

"There shall not be, my dear, if it will spoil the evening for you," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"I promised," said Anne.

At that moment the servants came in with the preparations for the afternoon tea, closely followed by the ever-punctual Cecil.

Mrs. Poynsett asked her whether she would require the barouche on the morrow, since Rosamond and Anne would want it to go to Backsworth, to obtain requisites for a children's entertainment to take place on Wednesday.

"Some friends of mine are coming on Wednesday," said Cecil.

"Indeed! In Raymond's absence?"

"This is not a dinner, but a ladies' party."

"Then it will combine the better."

"Certainly not," replied Cecil. "Mine is simply intellectual—only a few intelligent women to meet Mrs. Tallboys in the library. It will be quite apart from any amusements Rosamond may like to have for the children in the drawing-room."

"Pray, will they require nothing but this feast of reason and flow of soul?—for the housekeeper will need warning."

"They will have dined. Nothing but coffee will be wanted."

"For how many?"

"About twelve or fourteen, thank you. Excuse me — I have something to finish in my own room."

They were very glad to excuse her, and the following note was concocted to serve both for those she might have invited and those she might not; and it was copied by the two daughters for all the acquaintance who had young folks in their houses.

An appearance of want of unanimity was carefully avoided, and it stood thus :—

"I am desired by Mrs. Poynsett to say that the ladies' party already proposed for the 3rd is to undergo a little expansion, and that she much hopes to see you and ——, at 7 P.M., disposed for a few Christmas amusements."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DRIVE TO BACKSWORTH.

"She was betrothed to one now dead,
Or worse, who had dishonoured fled."
Scott.

THE party set out for Backsworth early in the day. It included Julius, who had asked for a seat in the carriage in order to be able to go on to Rood House, where lived Dr. Easterby, whom he had not seen since he had been at Compton.

"The great light of the English Church," said Rosamond gaily; while Anne shuddered a little, for Miss Slater had told her that he was the great fountain-head of all that distressed her in Julius and his curates. But Julius merely said, "I am very glad of the opportunity;" and the subject dropped in the eager discussion of the intended pastimes, which lasted beyond the well-known Wilsbro' bounds, when again Julius startled Anne by observing, "No dancing? That is a pity."

"There, Anne!" exclaimed Rosamond.

"It was out of kindness to me," said Anne; and then, with a wonderful advance of confidence, she added, "Please tell me how you, a minister, can regret it?"

"Because I think it would be easier to prevent mischief than when there has to be a continual invention of something original. There is more danger of offence and uncharitableness, to speak plainly."

"And you think that worse than dancing?" said Anne thoughtfully.

"Why is dancing bad at all, Anne?" asked Rosamond.

Anne answered at once, "It is worldly."

"Not half so worldly as driving in a carriage with fine horses, and liveries, and arms, and servants, and all," said Rosamond from her comfortable corner, nestling under Miles's racoon-skin rug; "I wonder you can do that!"

"The carriage is not mine," said Anne.

"The worldliness would be in sacrificing a duty to the luxury and ostentation of keeping one," said Julius. "For instance, if I considered it due to my lady in the corner there to come out in this style, and put down a curate and a few such trifles with that object. To my mind, balls stand on the same ground; they are innocent as long as nothing right is given up for them."

"You would not dance?" said Anne.

"Wouldn't he?" said Rosamond. "I've seen him.

It was at St. Awdry's at a Christmas party, in our courting days. No, it wasn't with me. Oh no! That was the cruel cut! It was with little Miss Marks, whose father had just risen from the ranks. Such a figure she was, enough to set your teeth on edge; when, behold! this reverend minister extracts her from the wall-flowers, and goes through the Lancers with her in first-rate style, I assure you. It had such an effect, do you know, that what does my father do but go and ask her next; and I heard an old lady remarking that there were only two gentlemen in the room, Mr. Charnock and Lord Rathforlane. So you see it was all worldliness after all, Anne."

"I suppose it was good-nature," said Anne.

"Indignation, I fancy," said Julius.

"Now, was he very wicked for it, Anne?"

"N—no, if dancing be not wrong."

"But why should it?"

"All the bad people danced in the Bible."

"Miriam—King David, eh?"

"That was part of their religious service."

"The welcome to the prodigal son?" further suggested Julius. "Does not this prove that the exercise is not sinful in itself?"

"But you would not do it again?" repeated Anne.

"I certainly should not make a practice of it, nor go to balls, any more than I would be a sportsman or a cricketer, because I am bound to apply my whole self to the more direct service; but this does not shew

that there is evil necessarily connected with these amusements, or that they may not safely be enjoyed by those who have time, and who need an outlet for their spirits, or by those who wish to guard these pleasures by presiding over them."

"Don't persuade me!" exclaimed Anne. "I gave my word to Mr. Pilgrim that nothing should induce me to dance or play at cards."

"Mr. Pilgrim had no right——" began Rosamond; but Julius hushed her, saying, "No one wishes to persuade you, Anne. Your retirement during Miles's absence is very suitable and becoming."

"Till we live in the Bush, out of the way of it all," said Anne.

"I wish you could have seen one of our real old Christmas parties; but those can never be again, without Mother herself or Mrs. Douglas."

"Do tell me about those Douglases," said Rosamond. "Cecil hinted at some romance, but seemed to think you had suppressed the connection because he was an attorney."

"Not exactly," said Julius, smiling; "but it is a sad story, though we have no doubt he bore the guilt of others."

"Something about two thousand pounds?"

"Yes. It was the year that my mother and Raymond were abroad. She had been buying some property near, and sent home an order from Vevay. It did not come, and was inquired for; but as it was

an order, not a draft, it was not stopped at the bank; and in about a fortnight more it was presented by a stranger, and paid without hesitation, as it was endorsed 'Proudfoot and Moy.' Old Proudfoot was away at Harrogate, and came home to investigate; young Proudfoot denied all knowledge of it, and so did his brother-in-law Moy; but Raymond, working at the other end, found that the waiter at the hotel at Vevay had forgotten to post the letter for more than a week, and it was traced through the post to Wilsbro', where the postman remembered delivering a foreign-looking letter to Archie Douglas at the door of the office. It came alone by the afternoon post. His account was this. They were all taking it rather easy in old Proudfoot's absence; and when a sudden summons came to take the old farmer's instructions for his will, Archie, as the junior, was told off to do it. He left George Proudfoot and Moy in a private room at the office, with Tom Vivian leaning over the fire talking, as he had a habit of doing in old Proudfoot's absence. As he opened the office door the postman put the letter into his hand; and recognising the writing, he ran back, and gave it in triumph to George Proudfoot, exclaiming that there it was at last; but he was in danger of being late for the train, and did not wait to see it opened; and when he came back he was told that it had been merely a letter of inquiry, with nothing in it, and destroyed at once. That was his account; but Proudfoot, Moy, and Vivian all

denied any knowledge of this return of his, or of the letter. The night of this inquiry he was missing. Jenny Bowater, who was with an aunt in London, heard that a gentleman had called to see her while she was out for a couple of days; and a week later we saw his name among the passengers lost in the *Hippolyta* off Falmouth."

"Poor Jenny! Was she engaged to him?"

"On sufferance. On her death-bed Mrs. Douglas had wrung from Mr. Bowater a promise that if Archie did well, and ever had means enough, he would not refuse consent; but he always distrusted poor Archie, because of his father, and I believe he sent Jenny away to be out of his reach. If any of us had only been near, I think we could have persuaded him to face it out, and trust to his innocence; but Raymond was abroad, Miles at sea, I at Oxford, and nothing like a counsellor was near. If Jenny had but seen him!"

"And has nothing happened to clear him?"

"No. Raymond hurried home, and did his best, but all in vain. George Proudfoot was indeed known to have been in debt to Vivian; but Moy, his brother-in-law, an older man, was viewed as a person whose word was above all question, and they both declared the signature at the back of the order not to be genuine. Archie's flight, you see, made further investigation impossible; and there was no putting on oath, no cross-examination."

"Then you think those three had it?"

"We can think nothing else, knowing Archie as we did. Raymond shewed his suspicions so strongly, that old Proudfoot threw up all agencies for our property, and there has been a kind of hostility ever since. Poor Vivian, as you know, came to his sad end the next year, but he had destroyed all his papers; and George Proudfoot has been dead four or five years, but without making any sign. Moy has almost risen above the business, and—see, there's Proudfoot Lawn, where he lives with the old man. He claims to compete with the county families, and would like to contest Wilsbro' with Raymond."

"And Jenny?" asked Anne. "Did she bear it as a Christian? I know she would."

"She did indeed—most nobly, most patiently. Poor girl! at her own home she knew she stood alone in her faith in Archie's innocence; but they were kind and forbearing, and kept silence, and the knowledge of our trust in him has bound her very close to us."

"Was that call, when she did not see him, all she ever heard of him?"

"All! except that he left a fragment of paper with the servant, with the one pencil scrawl, 'A Dieu!'—a capital D to mark the full meaning. She once shewed it to me—folded so as to fit into the back of a locket with his photograph."

"Dear Jenny! And had you traced him on board this ship?"

"No, but his name was in the list; and we knew he had a strong fancy for South Africa, whither the *Hippolyta* was bound. In fact he ought to have been a sailor, and only yielded to his mother's wishes."

"We knew a Mr. Archibald Douglas once," said Anne; "he came and outspanned by us when he was going north after elephants. He stayed a fortnight, because his waggon had to be mended."

"O Julius! if we could but find him for her again!" cried Rosamond.

"I am afraid Archibald Douglas is not much more individual a name than John Smith," said Julius sadly.

"That tells as much against the *Hippolyta* man," said Rosamond.

"Poor Archie would not be difficult to identify," said Julius; "for his hair was like mine, though his eyes were blue, and not short-sighted."

"That is all right, then," cried Anne; "for we had a dispute whether he were young or old, and I remember Mamma saying he had a look about him as if his hair might have turned white in a single night."

"Julius! Now won't you believe?" cried Rosamond.

"Had he a Scotch accent?" said Julius.

"No; I recollect Papa's telling him he never should have guessed him to be a Scot by his tongue; and he said he must confess that he had never seen Scotland."

"Now, Julius!" pleaded Rosamond, with clasped hands, as if Jenny's fate hung on his opinion.

"How long ago was this?" asked he.

"Four years," said Anne, with a little consideration. "He came both in going and returning, and Alick was wild to join him if he ever passed our way again. My father liked him so much that he was almost ready to consent; but he never came again. Ivory hunters go more from Natal now."

"You will trace him! There's a dear Anne!" exclaimed Rosamond.

"I will write to them at home; Alick knows a good many hunters, and could put Miles into the way of making inquiries, if he touches at Natal on his way home."

"Miles will do all he can," said Julius; "he was almost broken-hearted when he found how Archie had gone. I think he was even more his hero than Raymond when we were boys, because he was more enterprising; and my mother always thought Archie's baffled passion for the sea re-acted upon Miles."

"He will do it! He will find him, if he is the Miles I take him for! How old was he—Archie, I mean?"

"A year older than Raymond; but he always seemed much younger, he was so full of life and animation—so unguarded, poor fellow! He used to play tricks with imitating handwriting; and these, of course, were brought up against him."

"Thirty-four! Not a bit too old for the other end of the romance!"

"Take care, Rosie. Don't say a word to Jenny till we know more. She must not be unsettled only to be disappointed."

"Do you think she would thank you for that, you cold-blooded animal?"

"I don't know; but I think the suspense would be far more trying than the quiet resigned calm that has settled down on her. Besides, you must remember that even if Archie were found, the mystery has never been cleared up."

"You don't think that would make any difference to Jenny?"

"It makes all the difference to her father; and Jenny will never be a disobedient daughter."

"Oh! but it will—it must be cleared! I know it will! It is faithless to think that injustice is not always set right!"

"Not always here," said Julius sadly. "See, there's the Backsworth race-ground, the great focus of the evil."

"Were racing debts thought to have any part in the disaster?"

"That I can't tell; but it was those races that brought George Proudfoot under the Vivian influence; and in the absence of all of us, poor Archie, when left to himself after his mother's death, had become enough mixed up in their amuse-

ments to give a handle to those who thought him unsteady."

"As if anyone must be unsteady who goes to the races!" cried Rosamond. "You were so liberal about balls, I did expect one little good word for races; instead of which, you are declaring a poor wretch who goes to them capable of embezzling two thousand pounds, and I dare say Anne agrees with you!"

"Now, did I ever say so, Anne?"

"You looked at the course with pious horror, and said it justified the suspicion!" persisted Rosamond.

"That's better," said Julius; "though I never even said it justified the suspicion, any more than I said that balls might not easily be overdone, especially by *some* people."

"But you don't defend races?" said Anne.

"No; I think the mischief they do is more extensive, and has less mitigation than is the case with any other public amusement."

"Hm!" said Rosamond. "Many a merry day have I had on the top of the regimental drag; so perhaps there's nothing of which you would not suspect me."

"I'll tell you what I more than suspect you of," said Julius, "of wearing a gay bonnet to be a bait and a sanction to crowds of young girls, to whom the place was one of temptation, though not to you."

"Oh, there would be no end to it if one thought of such things."

"Or the young men who——"

"Well," broke in Rosamond, "it was always said that our young officers got into much less mischief than where there was a straight-laced colonel, who didn't go along with them to give them a tone."

"That I quite believe. I remember, too, the intense and breathless sense of excitement in the hush and suspense of the multitude, and the sweeping by of the animals——"

"Then you've been!" cried his wife.

"As a boy, yes."

"Not since you were old enough to think it over?" said Anne eagerly.

"No. It seemed to me that the amount of genuine interest in the sport and the animals was infinitesimal compared with the fictitious excitement worked up by betting."

"And what's the harm of betting when you've got the money?"

"And when you haven't?"

"That's another question."

"Do you approve it at the best?"

"It's a man's own concern."

"That's arguing against your better sense."

"Can't be helped, with two such solemn companions! There would be no bearing you if I didn't take you down sometimes, when you get so didactic, and talk of fictitious excitement, indeed! And now

you are going to Rood House, what will you be coming back?"

Rood House stood about two miles on the further side of Backsworth. It was an ancient almshouse, of which the mastership had been wisely given to Dr. Easterby, one of the deepest theological scholars, holiest men, and bravest champions of the Church, although he was too frail in health to do much, save with his pen, and in council with the numerous individuals who resorted to him from far and wide, and felt the beautiful old fragment of a monastic building where he dwelt a true court of peace and refreshment, whence they came forth, aided by prayer and counsel, for their own share of the combat.

Julius Charnock had, happily for himself, found his way thither when his character and opinions were in process of formation, and had ever since looked to Rood House for guidance and sympathy. To be only fourteen miles distant had seemed to him one great perfection of Compton Poynsett; but of course he had found visits there a far more possible thing to an unoccupied holiday son of the great house than to a busy parish priest, so that this opportunity was very valuable to him.

And so it proved; not so much for the details as for the spirit in which he was aided in looking at everything, from the mighty questions which prove the life of the Church by the vehement emotion they occasion, down to the difficulties of theory and

practice that harassed himself—not named, perhaps, but still greatly unravelled.

Those perpetual questions, that have to be worked out again and again by each generation, were before him in dealing with his parish; and among them stood in his case the deeper aspects of the question that had come forward on the drive, namely, the lawfulness and expedience of amusements.

Granting the necessity of pastimes and recreation for most persons, specially the young, there opened the doubtful, because ever-varying, question of the kind and the quantity to be promoted or sanctioned, lest restraint should lead to reaction, and lest abstinence should change from purity and spirituality to moroseness or hypocrisy. And if Julius found one end of the scale represented by his wife and his junior curate, his sister-in-law and his senior curate were at the other. Yet the old recluse was far more inclined to toleration than he had been in principle himself, though the spur of the occasion had led him to relaxations towards others in the individual cases brought before him, when he had thought opposition would do more harm than the indulgence. His conscience had been uneasy at this divergence, till he could discuss the subject.

The higher the aspiration of the soul, the less, of course, would be the craving for diversion, the greater the shrinking from those evil accompaniments that soon mar the most innocent delights. Some spirits

are austere in their purity, like Anne; some so fervent in zeal, as to heed nothing by the way, like Mr. Bindon; but most are in an advanced stage of childhood, and need play and pleasure almost as much as air or food; and these instincts require wholesome gratification, under such approval as may make the enjoyment bright and innocent; and yet there should be such subduing of their excess, such training in discipline, as shall save them from frivolity and from passing the line of evil, prevent the craving from growing to a passion, and where it has so grown tone it back to the limits of obedience and safety.

Alas! perhaps there lay the domestic difficulty of which Julius could not speak; yet, as if answering the thought, Dr. Easterby said, "After all, charity is the true self-acting balance to many a sweet untaught nature. Self-denials which spring out of love are a great safeguard, because they are almost sure to be both humble and unconscious."

And Julius went away cheered as he thought of his Rosamond's wells of unselfish affection, confident that all the cravings for variety and excitement, which early habit had rendered second nature, would be absorbed by the deeper and keener feelings within, and that these would mount higher as time went on, under life's great training.

Pleasant it was to see the triumphant delight of the two sisters over their purchases. Such a day's English shopping was quite a new experience to

Anne; and she had not been cautioned against it, so her enjoyment was as fresh and vivid as a child's; and they both chattered all the way home with a merriment in which Julius fully shared, almost surprised to see Anne so eager and lively, and—as her cheeks glowed and her eyes brightened—beginning to understand what had attracted Miles.

Mrs. Poynsett had not had quite so pleasant a day, for Cecil knocked at her door soon after luncheon with an announcement that Lady Tyrrell wished for admission. Expecting an exposition of the Clio scheme, she resigned herself, looking with some curiosity at the beautiful contour of face and drooping pensive loveliness, that had rather gained than lost in grace since the days when she had deemed them so formidable.

"This is kind, dear Mrs. Poynsett," said the soft voice, while the hand insisted on a pressure. "I have often wished to come and see you, but I could not venture without an excuse."

"Thank you," was the cold reply.

"I have more than an excuse—a reason, and I think we shall be fully agreed; but first you must let me have the pleasure of one look to recall old times. It is such a treat to see you so unchanged. I hope you do not still suffer."

"No, thank you."

"And are you always a prisoner here? Ah! I know your patience."

"What was the matter on which you wanted to speak to me?" said Mrs. Poynsett, fretted beyond endurance by the soft, caressing tone.

"As I said, I should hardly venture if I did not know we agreed—though perhaps not for the same reasons. We do agree in our love and high opinion of your dear Frank!"

"Well!" repressing a shudder at the "dear."

"I am afraid we likewise agree that, under all circumstances, our two young people are very unfortunately attached, and that we must be hard-hearted, and let it go no further."

"You mean your sister?"

"My dear Lena! I cannot wonder! I blame myself excessively, for it was all through my own imprudence. You see, when dear Frank came to Rockpier, it was so delightful to renew old times, and they both seemed such children, that I candidly confess I was off my guard; but as soon as I had any suspicion, I took care to separate them, knowing that, in the state of my poor father's affairs, it would be most unjustifiable to let so mere a youth be drawn into an attachment."

"Frank is no prize," said his mother with some irony.

"I knew you would say that, dear Mrs. Poynsett. Pecuniarily speaking, of course, he is not; though as to all qualities of the heart and head, he is a prize in the true sense of the word. But, alas! it is a sort of

necessity that poor Lena, if she marry at all, should marry to liberal means. I tell you candidly that she has not been brought up as she ought to have been, considering her expectations or no expectations. What could you expect of my poor father, with his habits, and two mere girls? I don't know whether the governess could have done anything; but I know that it was quite time I appeared. I tell you in confidence, dear Mrs. Poynsett, there was a heavy pull on my own purse before I could take them away from Rockpier; and, without blaming a mere child like poor dear Lena, you can see what sort of preparation she has had for a small income."

It is hard to say which tried Mrs. Poynsett's patience most, the "dears" or the candour; and the spirit of opposition probably prompted her to say, "Frank has his share, like his brothers."

"I understand, and for many girls the provision would be ample; but poor Lena has no notion of economizing—how should she? I am afraid there is no blinking it, that, dear children as they both are, nothing but wretchedness could result from their coming together; and thus I have been extremely sorry to find that the affair has been renewed."

"It was not an unnatural result of their meeting again."

"Ah! there I was to blame again; but no one can judge whether an attachment be real between such

children. I thought, too, that Frank would be gone out into the world, and I confess I did not expect to find that he had absolutely addressed her, and kept it secret. That is what my poor father feels so much. Eleonora is his special darling, and he says he could have overlooked anything but the concealment."

Maternal affection assumed the defensive; and, though the idea of concealment on the part of one of her sons was a shock, Mrs. Poynsett made no betrayal of herself, merely asking, "How did it come to light?"

"I extorted the confession. I think I was justified, standing in a mother's position, as I do. I knew my vigilance had been eluded, and that your son had walked home with her after the skating; and you know very well how transparent young things are."

The skating! The mother at once understood that Frank was only postponing the explanation till after his examination; and besides, she had never been ignorant of his attachment, and could not regard any display thereof more or less as deception towards herself. The very fact that Lady Tyrrell was trying to prejudice her beforehand, so as to deprive him of the grace of taking the initiative towards his own mother, enlisted her feelings in his defence, so she coldly answered, "I am sorry if Sir Harry Vivian thinks himself unfairly treated; but I should have thought my son's feelings had been as well known in the one family as in the other."

"But, *dear* Mrs. Poynsett," exclaimed Lady Tyrrell, "I am sure you never encouraged them. I am quite enough aware—whatever I may once have been—of the unfortunate contrast between our respective families."

Certainly there was no connection Mrs. Poynsett less wished to encourage; yet she could not endure to play into Camilla's hands, and made reply, "There are many matters in which young men must judge for themselves. I have only once seen Miss Vivian, and have no means of estimating my son's chances of happiness with her."

Her impenetrability ruffled Lady Tyrrell; but the answer was softer than ever. "Dear Mrs. Poynsett, what a happy mother you are, to be able so freely to allow your sons to follow their inclinations! Well! since you do not object, my conscience is easy on that score; but it was more than I durst hope."

To have one's approval thus stolen was out of the question, and Mrs. Poynsett said, "Regret is one thing, opposition another. Sir Harry Vivian need not doubt that, when my son's position is once fixed, he will speak openly and formally, and it will then be time to judge."

"Only," said Lady Tyrrell, rising, "let this be impressed on your son. Eleonora cannot marry till she is of age, and my father cannot sanction any previous entanglement. Indeed it is most unfortunate, if her affections have been tampered with, for me, who have outgrown romance, and know that, in her position, a

wealthy match is a necessity. I have spoken candidly," she repeated; "for I like Frank too well to bear that he should be trifled with and disappointed."

"Thank you!"

The ladies parted, liking one another, if possible, less than before.

Mrs. Poynsett's instinct of defence had made her profess much less distaste to the marriage than she really felt; she was much concerned that another son should be undergoing Raymond's sad experiences, but she had no fear that Lady Tyrrell would ever allow it to come to a marriage, and she did not think Frank's poetical enthusiasm and admiration for beauty betokened a nature that would suffer such an enduring wound as Raymond's had done.

So she awaited his return, without too much uneasiness for amusement in Rosamond's preparations. One opening into the conservatory was through her room, so that every skilful device, or gay ornament, could be exhibited to her; and she much enjoyed the mirth that went on between the queen of the revels and her fellow-workers.

Cecil did not interfere, being indeed generally with her friends at Sirenwood, Aucuba Villa, or the working-room, in all of which she had the pleasure of being treated as a person of great consideration, far superior to all her natural surroundings, and on whom hinged all the plans for the amelioration of Wilsborough.

Sometimes, however, it happens that the other side

of a question is presented; and thus it was on the day before the entertainment, when Rosamond had taken her brother Tom to have his hair cut, and to choose some false moustaches, and the like requisites, for their charades.

They went first to Pettitt's, the little hair-dresser, where Tom was marvellously taken with the two Penates, and could hardly be dragged into the innermost recesses, where in the middle of a sheet, with a *peignoir* on his shoulders, he submitted to the clipping of his raven-black locks, as Mr. Pettitt called them, on the condition of his sister looking on.

Presently they heard some feet enter the outer shop, and Mrs. Duncombe's voice asking for Mr. Pettitt; while his mother replied that he would wait on her immediately, but that he was just now engaged with the Honourable Mr. De Lancey. "Could she show them anything?"

"Oh no, thank you, we'll wait! Don't let us keep you, Mrs. Pettitt, it is only on business."

"Ay!" said the other voice—female, and entirely untamed. "He's your great ally about your gutters and drains, isn't he?"

"The only landowner in Wilsbro' who has a particle of public spirit!" said Mrs. Duncombe.

Whereat good-natured Lady Rosamond could not but smile congratulation to the haircutter, who looked meekly elevated, while Tom whispered, "Proverb contradicted."

But the other voice replied, "Of course—he's a perfumer, learned in smells! You'd better drop it, Bessie! you'll never make anything of it."

"I'll never drop what the health and life of hundreds of my fellow-creatures depend on! I wish I could make you understand, Gussie!"

"You'll never do anything with my Governor, if that's your hope—you should hear him and the Mum talking! 'It's all nonsense,' he says; 'I'm not going to annoy my tenants, and make myself unpopular, just to gratify a fashionable cry.' 'Well,' says Mumsey, 'it is not what was thought the thing for ladies in my time; but you see, if Gussie goes along with it, she will have the key to all the best county society.' 'Bother the county society!' says I. 'Bessie Duncombe's jolly enough—but such a stuck-up set as they all are at Compton, I'll not run after, behaving so ill to the Governor, too!' However——"

"There's a proverb about listeners!" said Rosamond, emerging when she felt as if she ought to hearken no longer, and finding Mrs. Duncombe leaning with her back to the counter, and a tall girl, a few degrees from beauty, in a riding-habit, sitting upon it.

They both laughed; and the girl added, "If you had waited a moment, Lady Rosamond, you would have heard that you were the only jolly one of all the b'iling!"

"Ah! we shall see where you are at the end of Mrs. Tallboys' lectures!" said Mrs. Duncombe.

"On what?" asked Rosamond. "Woman's rights, or sanitary measures? for I can't in the least understand why they should be coupled up together."

"Nor I!" said Miss Moy. "I don't see why we shouldn't have our own way, just as well as the men; but what that has to do with drains and gutters, I can't guess."

"I'm the other way," said Rosamond. "I think houses and streets ought to be made clean and healthy; but as for woman's rule, I fancy we get more of it now than we should the other way."

"As an instance," said Mrs. Duncombe, "woman is set on cleansing Wilsbro'. Man will not stir. Will it ever be done till woman has her way?"

"Perhaps, if woman would be patient, man would do it in the right way, instead of the wrong!" quoth Rosamond.

"Patient! No, indeed! Nothing is to be done by that! Let every woman strive her utmost to get the work done, as far as her powers go, and the crusade will be accomplished for very shame!"

Just then Tom, looking highly amused, emerged, followed by Mr. Pettitt, the only enlightened landlord on whom Mrs. Duncombe had been able to produce the slightest impression. He had owned a few small tenements in Water Lane, which he was about to rebuild, and which were evidently the pivot of operations.

At the door they met Cecil, and Rosamond detained

her a moment in the street to say, "My dear Cecil, is *that* Miss Moy coming on Wednesday?"

"Of course she is. We greatly want to move her father. He has the chief house property there."

"It is too late now," said Rosamond; "but do you think it can be pleasant to Jenny Bowater to meet her?"

"I know nothing of the old countrified animosities and gossipings, which you have so heartily adopted," replied Cecil proudly. "Firstly, I ignore them as beneath me; secondly, I sacrifice them all to a great cause. If Miss Bowater does not like my guests, let her stay away."

Here Mrs. Duncombe stood on the step, crying out, "Well, Cecil, how have you sped with Mrs. Bungay?"

"Horrid woman!" and no more was heard, as Cecil entered Mr. Pettitt's establishment.

"That might be echoed," said Tom, who was boiling over at the speech to his sister. "I knew that ape was an intolerable little prig of a peacock, but I didn't think she could be such a brute to you, Rosie! Is she often like that, and does your Parson stand such treatment of you?"

"Nonsense, Tom!" said Rosamond; "it doesn't often happen, and breaks no bones when it does. It's only the ignorance of the woman, and small blame to her—as Mrs. M'Kinnon said when Corporal Sims's wife threw the red herring's tail at her!"

"But does Julius stand it?" repeated Tom fiercely,

as if hesitating whether to call out Julius or Mrs. Charnock Poynsett.

"Don't be so ridiculous, Tom! I'd rather stand a whole shower of red herrings' tails at once than bother Julius about his brother's wife. How would you and Terry like it, if your wives took to squabbling, and setting you together by the ears? I was demented enough to try it once, but I soon saw it was worse than anything."

"What? He took her part?"

"No such thing! Hold your tongue, Tommy, and don't talk of married folk till you're one yourself!"

"Papa never meant it," repeated the indignant Tom. "I've a great mind to write and tell him how you are served!"

"Now, Tom," cried Rosamond, stopping short, "if you do that, I solemnly declare I'll never have you here again! What could Papa do? Do you think he could cure Raymond's wife of being a ridiculous little prig? And if he could—why, before your letter got to Meerut, she will be gone up to London; and by the time she comes back we'll be safe in our own Rectory. Here, come in, and get our string and basket at Mrs. Bungay's."

"I'll pay her out!" muttered Tom, as he followed his sister into Mrs. Bungay's shop, one of much smaller pretensions, for the sale of baskets, brushes, mats, &c.

The mistress, a stout, red-faced woman, looked as if

she had been "speaking a bit of her mind," and was at first very gruff and ungracious, until she found they were real customers; and moreover, Tom's bland Irish courtesy perfectly disarmed her, when Rosamond, having fixed her mind on a box in the very topmost pigeon-hole, they not only apologized for the trouble they were giving, but Tom offered to climb up and bring it down, when she was calling for the errand-boy in vain.

"It's no trouble, sir, thank you; I'd think nothing of that for you, my Lady, nor for Mr. Charnock—which I'm sure I'll never forget all he did for us at the fire, leading my little Alferd out like a lamb! I beg your Ladyship's pardon, Ma'am, if I seemed a bit hasty; but I've been so put about—and I thought at first you'd come in on the same matter, which I'm sure a lady like you wouldn't ever do—about the drains, and such like, which isn't fit for no lady to speak of! As if Water Lane weren't as sweet and clean as it has any call to be, and as if we didn't know what was right by our tenants, which are a bad lot, and don't merit no money to be laid out on them!"

"So you have houses in Water Lane, Mrs. Bungay? I didn't even know it!"

"Yes, Lady Rosamond! My husband and I thought there was no better investment than to buy a bit of land, when the waste was inclosed, and run 'em up cheap. Houses always lets here, you see, and the fire did no damage to that side. But of course

you didn't know, Lady Rosamond; a real lady like you wouldn't go prying into what she's no call to, like that fine decked-out body, Duncombe's wife, which had best mind her own children, which it is a shame to see stravaging about the place! I know it's her doing, which I told young Mrs. Charnock Poynsett just now, which I'm right sorry to see led along by the like of her, and so are more of us; and we all wishes some friend would give her a hint, which she is but young—and 'tis doing harm to Mr. Charnock Poynsett, Lady Rosamond, which all of us have a regard for, as is but right, having been a good customer, and friend to the town, and all before him; but we can't have ladies coming in with their fads, and calling us names for not laying out on what's no good to nobody, just to satisfy them! As if Wilsbro' hadn't been always healthy!"

Tom was wicked enough to put in a good many notes of sympathy, at the intervals of the conjunctive *whiches*, and to end by declaring, "Quite right, Mrs. Bungay! You see how much better we've brought up my sister! I say—what's the price of that little doll's broom?"

"What do you want of it, Tom?"

"Never you mind!"

"No mischief, I hope?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ENCHANTMENTS.

"'It seems a shame,' the Walrus said,
'To play them such a trick,
After we've brought them out so far,
And made them trot so quick.'
The carpenter said nothing, but
'The butter's spread too thick.'"

Lewis Carroll.

A TELEGRAM arrived from Frank, in the midst of the preparations on Wednesday, announcing that "he was all right, and should be at Hazlitt's Gate at 8.10 P.M."

At 6.30 children of all sizes, with manes of all colours, were arriving, and were regaled in the dining-room by Anne, assisted by Jenny and Charlie. Anne had a pretty pink colour in her cheeks, her flaxen locks were bound with green ribbons, and green adorned her white dress, in which she had a gracious, lily-like look of unworldly purity. She thoroughly loved children, was quite equal to the occasion, and indeed enjoyed it as much as the recent Christmas-tree in the village school.

Such of Cecil's guests as were mothers for the most

part came with their children; but Lady Tyrrell, her sister, and others, who were unattached, arrived later, and were shown to the library, where she entertained them on the specified refreshments, biscuits and coffee, and enthroned Mrs. Tallboys in the large arm-chair, where she looked most beautiful and gorgeous in a robe of some astonishing sheeny sky blue, edged with paly gold, while on her head was a coronal of sapphire and gold, with a marvellous little plume. The cost must have been enormous, and her delicate and spirituelle beauty was shown to the greatest advantage; but as the audience was far too scanty to be worth beginning upon, Cecil, with a sigh at the folly of maternal idolatry, went to hunt up her ladies from gazing at the babyish amusements of their offspring; and Miss Moy, in spite of her remonstrance, jumped up to follow her; while Mrs. Duncombe, the only *good* mother in this new sense, remained, keeping guard lest curiosity, and the echo of piano music, which now began to be heard, should attract away any more of the ladies.

Cecil was by no means prepared for the scene. The drawing-room was crowded — chiefly indeed with ladies and children, but there was a fair sprinkling of gentlemen—and all had their faces turned towards the great glass doors opening into the conservatory, which was brilliantly lighted, and echoing with music and laughter. Cecil tried to summon some of the ladies of her own inviting, announcing that Mrs. Tallboys

was arrived; but this appeared to have no effect. "Yes, thank you," was all she heard. Penetrating a little farther, "Mrs. Tallboys is ready." "Thank you, I'll come; but my little people are so anxious to have me with them."—"Mrs. Tallboys is waiting!" to the next; who really did not hear, but only responded, "Did you ever see anything more charming?"

By this time Cecil could see over the heads of the front rank of children. She hardly knew the conservatory. All the veteran camellia and orange-trees and a good many bay and laurel boughs besides, were ranged along the central alley, gorgeous with fairy lamps and jewels, while strains of soft music proceeded from some unseen quarter. "Very pretty!" said Cecil hastily, trying another of her intended guests with her intelligence. "Really—yes, presently, thank you," was the absent answer. "There is some delightful mystery in there."

Cecil found her attempts were vain, and was next asked, as one of the household, what delicious secret was going on there; and as it hurt her feelings to be left out, she pressed into the conservatory, with some vague intention of ordering Anne, if not Rosamond, to release her grown-up audience, and confine their entertainment to the children; but she found herself at once caught by the hand by a turbaned figure like a prince in the *Arabian Nights*, who, with a low salaam, waved her on.

"No, thank you. I'm looking for——"

But retreat was impossible, for many were crowding up in eager curiosity; moreover, a muslin bandage descended on her eyes. "Don't!" she expostulated; "I'm not at play—I'm——" but her words were lost.

"Hush! the Peri's cave is near,
No one enters scatheless here;
Lightly tread and lowly bend,
Win the Peri for your friend,"

sung a voice to the mysterious piano accompaniment; and Cecil found both hands taken, and was forced to move on, as she guessed, the length of the conservatory, amid sounds of suppressed laughter that exceedingly annoyed her, till there was a pause and repetition of the two last lines, with an attempt to make her obey them. She was too impatient and angry to perceive that it would have been much better taste to enter into the humour of the thing; and she only said, with all her peculiar cold petulance, just like sleet, "Let me go, if you please; I am engaged. I am waited for."

"Peri gracious,
She's contumacious;
Behold, every hair shall bristle
When she hears the magic whistle!"

and a whistle, sharp, long, and loud, sounded behind her, amid peals of merriment. She turned sharply round, but still the whistle was behind her, and rang out again and again, till she was half deafened, and wholly irate; while the repetition of

"Bend, bend, lowly bend,
Win the Peri for your friend,"

forced on her the conviction that on no other condition should she be set free, though the recognition of Terry's voice made the command doubly unpalatable, and as she made the stiffest and most reluctant of courtesies, a voice said,

"Homage done, you may be
Of this merry company;"

and with a last blast of the whistle the bandage was removed, and she found herself in the midst of a half circle of laughing children and grown people; in front of her a large opening, like a cavern, hung with tiny lamps of various colours, in the midst of which stood the Peri, in a Persian pink robe, white turban, and wide white trousers, with two oriental genies attendant upon her.

A string was thrust into Cecil's hand, apparently fastened to her, and accounting for some sharp pulls she had felt during the whistling. She drew it in front in sharp haste, to be rid of the obnoxious instrument; but instead of a whistle, she found in her hand a little dust-pan and brush, fit for a baby-house, drawn through a ring, while the children eagerly cried, "What have you got? What have you got?"

"Some nonsense. I do not approve of practical jokes," began Cecil; but the song only replied,

"Away, away,
In the cave no longer stay;
Others come to share our play;"

and one of the genies drew her aside, while another blindfolded victim was being introduced with the same rites, only far more willingly. The only way open to her was that which led to the window of the dining-room, where she found Anne with the children who had had their share, and were admiring their prizes. Anne tried to soothe her by saying, "You see everyone is served alike. They thought it would be newer than a tree."

"Did you mean to *give* me *this?*" asked a little girl, in whose hands Cecil had thrust her dust-pan, without a glance at it.

"Oh, the ring!" said Anne. "You must keep that, Mrs. Poynsett thought you would like it. It is a gem—some Greek goddess, I think."

"Is this her arrangement?" asked Cecil, pointing to the dust-pan.

"Oh no! she knew nothing about that, nor I; but you see everyone has something droll. See what Mr. Bowater has!"

And Herbert Bowater showed that decidedly uncomplimentary penwiper, where the ass's head declares "There are two of us;" while every child had some absurdity to show; and Miss Moy's shrieks of delight were already audible at a tortoiseshell penholder disguised as a hunting-whip.

"I must go to my friends," said Cecil, vouchsafing no admiration of the ring, though she had seen enough to perceive that it was a beautifully engraved ruby;

and she hurried back to the library, but only to find all her birds flown, and the room empty! Pursuing them to the drawing-room, she saw only the backs of a few, in the rearmost rank of the eager candidates for admission to the magic cave.

Lady Tyrrell alone saw her, and turned back from the eager multitude, to say in her low, modulated voice, "Beaten, my dear. Able strategy on *la belle mère's* part!"

"Where's Mrs. Tallboys?"

"Don't you see her blue feather, eagerly expectant? Just after you were gone, Edith Bowater came in, and begged us to come and see the conservatory lighted up; and then came a rush of the Brendon children after their aunt, exclaiming wildly it was delicious—lights, and a fairy, and a secret, and everyone got something, if they were ever so old. Of course, after that there was nothing but to follow the stream."

"It is a regular plot for outwitting us! Rosamond is dressed up for the fairy. They are all in league."

"Well, we must put a good face on it for the present," said Lady Tyrrell. "Don't on any account look as if you were not in perfect accordance. You can show your sentiments afterwards, you know."

Cecil saw she must acquiesce, for Mrs. Tallboys was full in the midst. With an infinitely better grace than her hostess, she yielded herself to the sports, bowed charmingly to the Peri, whirled like a fairy at the whistling, and was rewarded with a little enamel

padlock as a brooch, and two keys as ear-rings; indeed she professed, with evident sincerity, that she was delighted with these sports of the old country, and thought the two genies exquisite specimens of the fair, useless, gentle English male aristocracy.

Mrs. Duncombe, too, accepted the inevitable with considerable spirit and good humour, though she had a little passage-at-arms with Julius; when showing him the ivory cardcase that had fallen to her lot, she said, "So this is the bribe! Society stops the mouth of truth."

"That is as you choose to take it," he said.

"Exactly. When we want to go deep into eternal verities, you silence us with frivolous din and dainty playthings, for fear of losing your slaves."

"I don't grant that."

"Then why hinder an earnest discussion by all this hubbub?"

"Because this was not the right place or time."

"It never is the right time for the tyrants to let their slaves confer, or to hear home-truths."

"On the contrary, my curiosity is excited. I want to hear Mrs. Tallboys' views."

"Then when will you dine with us? Next Wednesday?"

"Thank you. Wednesday has an evening service."

"Ah! I told you it was never the right time! Then Thursday? And you'll trust your wife with us?"

"Oh yes, certainly."

"It is a bargain, then? Seven o'clock, or there will be no time."

Julius's attention suddenly wandered. Was not a whisper pervading the room of a railway accident? Was not Frank due by that night's train?

There were still so many eager to visit the magic cave, that Julius trusted his wife would remain there sheltered from the report; Jenny Bowater was behind a stand of trees, acting orchestra; but when Terry came to the outskirts of the forest in search of other knights of the whistle, Julius laid a hand on him, and gave instructions in case any rumour should reach Rosamond to let her know how vague it was, tell her that he was going to ascertain the truth, and beg her to keep up the game and cause no alarm.

Next encountering Anne, he begged her to go to his mother and guard her from any alarm, until there was some certainty.

"Can't we send all these people away?" she asked.

"Not yet. We had better make no unnecessary disturbance. There will be time enough if anything be amiss. I am going down to Hazlitt's Gate."

Anne was too late. Charlie had not outgrown the instinct of rushing to his mother with his troubles; and he was despairingly telling the report he had heard of a direful catastrophe, fatal to an unknown quantity of passengers, while she, strong and composed because he gave way, was trying to sift his intelligence.

No sooner did he hear from Anne that Julius was going to the station, than he started up to accompany him—the best thing he could do in his present state. Hardly, however, had he closed the door, before he returned with fresh tears in his eyes, leading in Eleonora Vivian, whom he had found leaning against the wall just outside, white and still, scarce drawing her breath.

"Come," he said; and before she knew what he was doing, she was at Mrs. Poynsett's side. "Here, Mother," he said, "take her." And he was gone.

Mrs. Poynsett stretched out her arms. The hearts of the two women who loved Frank could not help meeting. Eleonora sank on her knees, hiding her face on the mother's breast, with two tender arms clasped round her.

Anne was kneeling too, but she was no longer the meek, shy stranger. Now, in the hour of trouble, she poured forth, in a voice fervent and sweet, a prayer for protection and support for their beloved one, so that it might be well with him, whatever might be his Heavenly Father's Will.

As she paused, Mrs. Poynsett, in a choked voice, said, "Thank you, dear child;" when there were steps in the hall. Anne started up, Lenore buried her face on Mrs. Poynsett's bosom, the mother clasped her hands over her convulsively, then beheld, as the door opened, a tall figure, with a dark bright face full of ineffable softness and joy. Frank himself, safe and

sound, with his two brothers behind him. They stayed not to speak, but hastened to spread the glad tidings; while he flung himself down, including both his mother and Lenore in one rapturous embrace, and carrying his kiss from one to the other—conscious, if no one else was, that this first seal of his love was given in his mother's arms.

Lenore did indeed extricate herself, and stand up as rosy red as she had been pale; but she had no room for any thought beyond his mother's trembling "Not hurt, my dear?"

"Not hurt! Not a scratch! Thank God! Oh! thank God!" answered Frank, quivering all over with thankfulness, though probably far more at the present joy than the past peril.

"Yes—oh, thanks for His mercy!" echoed Anne, giving fervent hand and tearful cheek to the eager salutation, which probably would have been as energetic to Clio or old Betty at that moment!

"But there's blood on your wristband," cried the mother. "You are hurt!"

"No; it's not mine. I didn't know it. It is from the poor fellow I helped to carry into the public-house at Knoll, just this side Backsworth, a good deal hurt, I'm afraid. Something had got on the lines, I believe. I was half asleep, and knew nothing till I found ourselves all crushed up together in the dark, upside-down, my feet above my head. There was but one man in my carriage, and we didn't get foul of one

another, and found we were all right, when we scrambled out at the window. So we helped out the others, and found that, besides the engineer and stoker—who I don't suppose can live, poor fellows!—there was only this man much damaged. Then, when there seemed no more to be done, I took my bag and walked across country, to reach home before you heard. But oh, this is worth anything!"

He had to bend down for another embrace from his mother, whose heart was very full as she held his bright young healthful face between her hands, though all she said was, "You have walked eleven miles and more! You must be half starved!—Anne, my dear, pray let him have something. He can eat it here."

"I'll see," said Anne, hastening away.

"Oh, don't go, Lenore," cried Frank, springing up. "Stay, I've not seen you!—Mother, how sweet of you! But I forgot! You don't know! I was only waiting till I was through."

"I understand, my dear boy."

"But how? How did you find out? Was it only that you knew she was the precious darling of my heart? and now you see and own why," cried Frank, almost beside himself with excitement and delight.

"It was Lady Tyrrell who told me," said Mrs. Poynsett, sympathizing too much with the lovers to perceive that her standpoint of resistance was gone from her.

"Yes," said Lenore. "She knew of our walk, and

questioned me so closely that I could not conceal anything without falsehood."

"After she met me at Aucuba Villa?" asked Frank.

"Yes. Did you tell her anything?"

"I thought she knew more than I found afterwards that she did," said Frank; "but there's no harm done. It is all coming now."

"She told my father," said Eleonora sadly, "and he cannot understand our delay. He is grieved and displeased, and thinks I have not been open with him."

"Oh! that will be all right to-morrow," said Frank. "I'll have it out with a free heart, now there's no fear but that I have passed; and I've got the dearest of mothers! I feel as if I could meet him if he were a dozen examiners rolled into one, instead of the good old benevolent parent that he is! Ha! Anne—Susan—Jenkins—thank you—that's splendid! May I have it here? Super-excellent! Only here's half the clay-pit sticking to me! Let me just run up and make myself decent. Only don't let her run away."

Perhaps Clio would have scorned the instinct that made a Charnock unable to enjoy a much-needed meal in the presence of mother and of love till the traces of the accident and the long walk had been removed. His old nurse hurried after—ostensibly to see that his linen was at hand, but really to have her share of the petting and congratulation; and Lenore stood a little embarrassed, till Mrs. Poynsett held out

her arms, with the words, "My dear child!" and again she dropped on her knee by the couch, and nestled close in thankful joy.

Presently, however, she raised herself, and said sadly, almost coldly, "I am afraid you have been surprised into this."

"I must love one who so loves my boy," was the ardent answer.

"I couldn't help it!" said the maiden, again abandoning herself to the tenderness. "Oh! it is so good of you!"

"My dear dear daughter!"

"Only please give me one mother's kiss! I have so longed for one."

"Poor motherless child! My sweet daughter!"

Then after a pause Eleonora said, "Indeed, I'll try to deserve better; but oh! pray forgive me, if I cost him much more pain and patience than I am worth."

"He thinks you well worth anything, and perhaps I do," said Mrs. Poynsett, who was conquered, won over, delighted more than by either of the former brides, in spite of all antecedents.

"Then will you always trust me?" said Eleonora, with clasped hands, and a wondrous look of earnest sincerity on her grave open brow and beautiful pensive dark blue eyes.

"I *must*, my dear."

"And indeed I don't think I could help holding to *him*, because he seems my one stay and hope here;

and now I know it is all right with you, indeed it is such happiness as I never knew."

She laid her head down again in subdued joy and rest: but the pause was broken by Frank's return; and a moment after, in darted the Peri in her pink cashmere costume, with a glow transforming her usually colourless face. "Dear, dear Frank, I'm so glad!" she cried, bestowing her kiss; while he cried in amazement, "Is it Rose? Is there a fancy ball?"

"Only Aladdin's Cave. I'm just out of it; and while Jenny is keeping up games, and Edith is getting up a charade, I could dash in to see that Frank was all there, and more too. The exam. is safe, eh?"

"I trust so," said Frank; "the list will not come just yet; but I am told I am certain of a pass—indeed, that I stand high as to numbers."

"That's noble!—Now, Mrs. Poynsett, turn him out as soon as he has eaten his dinner. We want anyone who can keep up a respectable kind of a row. I say, will you two do Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess? You look just like it."

"Must we go?" asked Frank reluctantly; and there was something in the expression of his face, a little paler than usual, that reminded his mother that the young man had for the first time seen sudden and violent death that day, and that though his present gladness was so great, yet that he had gone through too much in body and mind for the revels of the evening not either to jar, or to produce a vehement

reaction, if he were driven into them. So she answered by pleading the eleven miles' walk; and the queen of the sports was merciful, adding, "But I must be gone, or Terry will be getting up his favourite *tableau* of the wounded men of Clontarf, or Rothesay, or the Black Bull's Head, or some equally pleasing little incident."

"Is it going on well?" asked Mrs. Poynsett.

"Sweetly! Couldn't be better. They have all amalgamated, and are in the midst of the 'old family coach,' with Captain Duncombe telling the story. He is quite up to the trick, and enjoys turning the tables on his ladies."

"And Camilla?" asked Lenore, in a hesitating, anxious tone.

"Oh! she's gone in for it. I think she is the springs! I heard her ask where you were, and Charley told her; so you need not be afraid to stay in peace, if you have a turn that way. Good-bye; you'd laugh to see how delighted people are to be let off the lecture." And she bent over Lenore with a parting kiss, full of significance of congratulation.

She returned, after changing her dress, to find a pretty fairy tableau, contrived by the Bowater sisters, in full progress, and delighting the children and the mothers. Lady Vivian contrived to get a word with her as she returned.

"Beautifully managed, Lady Rosamond. I tell Cecil she should enjoy a defeat by such strategy."

"It is Mrs. Poynsett's regular Christmas party," said Rosamond, not deigning any other reply.

"I congratulate her on her skilful representatives," said Lady Tyrrell. "May I ask if we are to see the hero of the day? No? What! you would say better employed? Poor children, we must let them alone to-night for their illusion, though I am sorry it should be deepened; it will be only the more pain by and by."

"I don't see that," said Rosamond stoutly.

"Ah! Lady Rosamond, you are a happy young bride, untaught what is *l'impossible*." Rosamond could not help thinking that no one understood it better than she, as the eldest of a large family with more rank and far more desires than means; but she disliked Lady Tyrrell far too much for even her open nature to indulge in confidences, and she made a successful effort to escape from her neighbourhood by putting two pale female Fullers into the place of honour in front of the folding doors into the small drawing-room, which served as a stage, and herself hovered about the rear, wishing she could find some means of silencing Miss Moy's voice, which was growing louder and more boisterous than ever.

The charade which Rosamond had expected was the inoffensive, if commonplace, *Inspector*, and the window she beheld, when the curtain drew up was, she supposed, the bar of an inn. But no; on the board were two heads, ideals of male and female

beauty, one with a waxed moustache, the other with a huge chignon, vividly recalling Mr. Pettitt's Penates. Presently came by a dapper professor, in blue spectacles and a college cap, who stood contemplating, and indulging in a harangue on entities and molecules, spirit and matter, affinities and development, while the soft deep brown eyes of the chignoned head languished, and the blue ones of the moustached one rolled, and the muscles twitched and the heads turned till, by a strong process of will explained by the Professor, they bent their necks, erected themselves, and finally started into life, and the curtain fell on them with clasped hands!

It rose to show the newly-animated pair, Junius Brutus and Barberina his wife, at the breakfast-table with a boar's head of brawn before them, while the Lady Barberina boldly asserted her claims to the headship of the house. Had she not lately been all head?

The pathetic reply was, "Would it were so still, my dear. All head and no tongue, like our present meal."

The lady heaved up the boar's head to throw at him, and the scene closed.

Next, Brutus was seen awkwardly cleaning his accoutrements, having enlisted, as he soliloquized, to escape from woman.

Enter a sergeant with a rich Irish brogue, and other recruits, forming the awkward squad. The

drill was performed with immense spirit, but only one of the soldiers showed any dexterity; but while the sergeant was upholding him as "the very moral of a patthern to the rest," poor Brutus was seized with agonizing horror at the recognition of Barberina in this disguise!

"Why not?" she argued. "Why should not woman learn to use the arms of which man has hitherto usurped the use?"

Poor Brutus stretched out his arms in despair, and called loudly for the Professor to restore him to his original state of silent felicity in the barber's window.

"Ye needn't do that, me boy," quoth the sergeant with infinite scorn. "Be ye where ye will, ye'll never be aught but a blockhead."

Therewith carriages were being announced to the heads of families; and with compliments and eager thanks, and assurances that nothing could have been more delightful, the party broke up.

Captain Duncombe, while muffling his boys, declared that he never saw a cleverer hit in his life, and that those two De Lancey brothers ought to be on the stage; while Miss Moy loudly demanded whether he did not feel it personal; and Mrs. Tallboys, gracefully shaking hands with Anne and Rosamond, declared it a grand challenge where the truth had been unconsciously hit off. Cecil was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEMONSTRATIONS.

"Nursing her wrath to keep it warm."

Burns.

THE hours of the *soirée* had been early; but the breakfast was so irregular and undecided as to time, that no one took much notice of an intimation which Jenkins had received from the grim Mrs. Grindstone that Mrs. Charnock Poynsett would take breakfast in her own room. Indeed, they all felt glad that her views of etiquette did not bind them to their places; for Frank was burning to be off to Sirenwood, forgetting that it was far easier to be too early than too late for Sir Harry Vivian, who was wont to smoke till long after midnight, and was never visible till the midday repast.

And thus it was Lady Tyrrell who came to Frank alone. "Early afoot," she said; "you foolish, impatient fellow! You *will* outrun my best advice."

"Ah! but I'm armed. I always told you we might trust to my mother, and it is all right. She loves

Lenore with all her heart, and consents freely and gladly."

"Indeed! Well, the dear child has made her conquest!"

"I always knew she would when once reserve was broken down."

"Did you get up the alarm on purpose?"

"Really, one would think I had done so. One such moment was worth years of ordinary meetings! Half the battle is won!"

"Have you seen your mother this morning?"

"No; but she knew I was coming."

"Then you do not know what her feelings are on cooler reflection?"

"My mother would never retract what she has once assured me of," said Frank haughtily.

"Forgive me—of what has she assured you?"

"That she regards Eleonora as a dear daughter, and that implies doing the same for me as for my brothers. If Sir Harry would but be so good as to come and see her——"

"Stay, Frank, you have not come that length. You forget that if you have, as you say, gained half the battle, there is another half; and that my father very reasonably feels hurt at being the last to be favoured with the intelligence."

"Dear Lady Tyrrell, you can see how it was. There was no helping it when once I could speak to Lenore; and then no one would have let me utter a word till

I had gone through the examination. We never meant to go on a system of concealment; but you know how every one would have raved and stormed if I had betrayed a thought beyond old Driver, and yet it was only being at rest about Lenore that carried me through without breaking down. Can't you see?"

"You special pleader! May you win over my father; but you must remember that we are a fallen house, unable to do all we wish."

"If I might see Sir Harry! I must make him forgive me."

"I will see whether he is ready."

Could Frank's eyes have penetrated the walls, he would have seen Lady Tyrrell received with the words, "Well, my dear, I hope you have got rid of the young man—poor fellow!"

"I am afraid that cannot be done without your seeing him yourself."

"Hang it! I hate it! I can't abide it, Camilla. He's a nice lad, though he is his mother's son; and Lenore's heart is set on him, and I can't bear vexing the child."

"Lena cares for him only because she met him before she knew what life is like. After one season she will understand what five hundred a year means."

"Well, you ought to know your sister best; but if the lad has spoken to her, Lena is not the girl to stand his getting his *congé* so decidedly."

"Exactly; it would only lead to heroics, and deepen the mischief."

"Hang it! Then what do you want me to say?"

"Stand up for your rights, and reduce him to submission by displeasure at not having been consulted. Then explain how there can be no engagement at once; put him on his honour to leave her free till after her birthday in November."

"What! have him dangling after her? That's no way to make her forget him."

"She never will under direct opposition—she is too high-spirited for that; but if we leave it alone, and they are unpledged, there is a fair chance of her seeing the folly both for her and for him."

"I don't know that. Lena may be highflown; but things go deep with the child—deeper than they did with you, Camilla!"

Perhaps this was a stab, for there was bitterness in the answer. "You mean that she is less willing to give up a fancy for the family good. Remember, it is doubly imperative that Lena should marry a man whose means are in his own power, so that he could advance something. This would be simply ruin—throwing up the whole thing, after all I have done to retrieve our position."

"After all, Camilla, I am growing an old man, and poor Tom is gone. I don't know that the position is worth so much to me as the happiness to her, poor child!" said Sir Harry wistfully.

"Happiness!" was the scornful answer. "If you said 'her own way,' it would be nearer the truth. A back street in London—going about in a cab—and occasional holidays on sufferance from Mrs. Poynsett."

However little happiness either father or daughter had derived from their chosen ways, this idea was abhorrent to both; and Lady Tyrrell pressed her advantage. "If we keep him waiting much longer he will be rushing after Lena, and if you show the least sign of relenting he will insist on dragging you to an interview with his mother."

The threat was effectual; for Sir Harry had had passages-at-arms enough with Mrs. Poynsett to make him dread her curt, dry civility far more than either dun or bailiff, and he was at once roused to the determination to be explicit.

Frank met him, with crimson face and prepared speech. "Good morning, Sir Harry! I am afraid you may think that you have reason to complain of my not having spoken to you sooner; but I trusted to your previous knowledge of my feelings, and I was anxious to ascertain my position before laying it before you, though I don't believe I should have succeeded unless my mind had been set at rest."

Soft-hearted Sir Harry muttered, "I understand, but——"

The pause at that "but" was so long that Frank ventured on going on. "I have not had an official

communication, but I know privately that I have passed well and stand favourably for promotion, so that my income will go on increasing, and my mother will make over to me five thousand pounds, as she has done to Miles and Julius, so that it can be settled on Eleonora at once."

"There, there, that's enough!" said Sir Harry, coerced by his daughter's glances; "there's plenty of time before coming to all that! You see, my dear boy, I always liked you, and had an immense respect for your—your family; but, you see, Eleonora is young, and under the circumstances she ought not to engage herself. She can't any way marry before coming of age, and—considering all things—I should much prefer that this should go no further."

"You ought both to be free!" said Lady Tyrrell.

"That I can never be!"

"Nor do you think that she can—only it sounds presumptuous," smiled Lady Tyrrell. "Who can say? But things have to be proved; and considering what young untried hearts are, it is safer and happier for both that there should be perfect freedom, so that no harm should be done, if you found that you had not known your own minds."

"It will make no difference to me."

"Oh yes, we know that!" laughed Sir Harry. "Only suppose you changed your mind, we could not be angry with you."

"You don't think I could!"

"No, no," said Lady Tyrrell; "we think no such thing. Don't you see, if we did not trust your honour, we could not leave this in suspense. All we desire is that these matters may be left till it is possible to see our way, when the affairs of the estate are wound up; for we can't tell what the poor child will have. Come don't repeat that it will make no difference. It may not to you; but it must to us, and to your mother."

"My mother expects nothing!" said Frank eagerly; but it was a false step.

Sir Harry bristled up, saying, "Sir, my daughter shall go into no family that—that has not a proper appreciation of — and expectations befitting her position."

"Dear Papa," exclaimed Lady Tyrrell, "he means no such thing. He is only crediting his mother with his own romantic ardour and disinterestedness.—Hark! there actually is the gong. Come and have some luncheon, and contain yourself, you foolish boy!"

"I am sorry I said anything that seemed unfitting," said Frank meekly. "You know I *could* not meanit!"

"Yes, yes, yes, I bear no malice; only one does not like to see one's own child courted without a voice in the matter, and to hear she is to be taken as a *favour*, expecting nothing. But, there, we'll say no more. I like you, Frank Charnock! and only wish you had ten thousand a year, or were anyone else; but you see—you see. Well, let's eat our luncheon."

"Does she know this decision?" asked Frank, aside, as he held open the door for Lady Tyrrell.

"Yes, she knows it can go no further; though we are too merciful to deny you the beatific vision, provided you are good, and abstain from any more little *tendresses* for the present.—Ah!"—enter Cecil—"I thought we should see you to-day, my dear!"

"Yes; I am on my way to meet my husband at the station," said Cecil, meeting her in the hall, and returning her kiss.

"Is Raymond coming home to-day?" said Frank, as he too exchanged greetings. "Ah! I remember; I did not see you at breakfast this morning."

"No!" and there was signification in the voice; but Frank did not heed it, for coming down stairs was Eleonora, her face full of a blushing sweetness, which gave it all the beauty it had ever lacked.

He could do no more than look and speak before all the rest; the carriage was ordered for the sisters to go out together, and he lingered in vain for a few words in private, for Sir Harry kept him talking about Captain Duncombe's wonderful colt, till Cecil had driven off one way, and their two hostesses the other; and he could only ride home to tell his mother how he had sped.

Better than Rosamond, better even than Charlie, was his mother as a confidante; and though she had been surprised into her affectionate acceptance of

Eleonora, it was an indescribable delight to mother and son to find themselves once more in full sympathy; while he poured out all that had been pent up ever since his winter at Rockpier. She almost made common cause with him in the question, what would Raymond say? And it proved to be news to her that her eldest son was to be immediately expected at home. Cecil had not come to see her, and had sent her no message; but ungracious inattention was not so uncommon as to excite much remark from one who never wished to take heed to it; and it was soon forgotten in the praise of Eleonora.

Cecil meanwhile was receiving Raymond at the station. He was pleased to see her there in her pony-carriage, but a little startled by the brief coldness of her reply to his inquiry after his mother, and the tight compression of her lips all the time they were making their way through the town, where, as usual, he was hailed every two or three minutes by persons wanting a word with him. When at last there was a free space, she began: "Raymond, I wish to know whether you mean me to be set at naught, and my friends deliberately insulted?"

"What?"

A gentleman here hurried up with "I'll not detain you a minute."

He did, however, keep them for what seemed a great many, to the chafing spirit which thought a husband should have no ears save for his wife's

wrongs; so she made her preface even more startling —"Raymond, I cannot remain in the house any longer with Lady Rosamond Charnock and those intolerable brothers of hers!"

"Perhaps you will explain yourself," said Raymond, almost relieved by the evident exaggeration of the expressions.

"There has been a conspiracy to thwart and insult me—a regular conspiracy!"

"Cecil! let me understand you. What can have happened?"

"When I arranged an evening for my friends to meet Mrs. Tallboys, I did not expect to have it swamped by a pack of children, and noisy nonsensical games, nor that both she and I should be insulted by practical jokes and a personal charade."

"A party to meet Mrs. Tallboys?"

"A ladies' party, a *conversazione*."

"What—by my mother's wish?"

"I was given to understand that I had *carte blanche* in visiting matters."

"You did not ask her consent?"

"I saw no occasion."

"You did not?"

"No."

"Then, Cecil, I must say that whatever you may have to complain of, you have committed a grave act of disrespect."

"I was told that I was free to arrange these things!"

"Free!" said Raymond, thoroughly roused; "free to write notes, and order the carriage, and play lady of the house; but did you think that made you free to bring an American mountebank of a woman to hold forth absurd trash in my mother's own drawing-room, as soon as my back was turned?"

"I should have done the same had you been there."

"Indeed!" ironically; "I did not know how far you had graduated in the Rights of Women. So you invited these people?"

"Then the whole host of children was poured in on us, and everything imaginable done to interrupt, and render everything rational impossible. I know it was Rosamond's contrivance, she looked so triumphant, dressed in an absurd fancy dress, and her whole train doing nothing but turning me into ridicule, and Mrs. Tallboys too. Whatever you choose to call her, you cannot approve of a stranger and foreigner being insulted here. It is that about which I care—not myself; I have seen none of them since, nor shall I do so until a full apology has been made to my guest and to myself."

"You have not told me the offence."

"In the first place, there was an absurd form of Christmas-tree, to which one was dragged blindfold, and sedulously made ridiculous; and I—I had a dust-pan and brush. Yes, I had, in mockery of our endeavours to purify that unhappy street."

"I should have taken it as a little harmless fun," said Raymond. "Depend on it, it was so intended."

"What, when Mrs. Tallboys had a padlock and key? I see you are determined to laugh at it all. Most likely they consulted you beforehand."

"Cecil, I cannot have you talk such nonsense. Is this all you have to complain of?"

"No. There was a charade on the word Blockhead, where your brother Charles and the two De Lanceys caricatured what they supposed to be Mrs. Tallboys' doctrines."

"How did she receive it?"

"Most good-humouredly; but that made it no better on their part."

"Are you sure it was not a mere ordinary piece of pleasantry, with perhaps a spice of personality, but nothing worth resenting?"

"You did not see it. Or perhaps you think no indignity towards me worth resentment?"

"I do not answer that, Cecil; you will think better of those words another time," said Raymond sternly. "But when you want your cause taken up, you have to remember that whatever the annoyance, you brought it upon yourself and her, by your own extraordinary proceeding towards my mother—I will not say towards myself. I will try to smooth matters. I think the De Lanceys must have acted foolishly; but the first step ought to be an expression of regret for such conduct towards my mother."

"I cannot express regret. I ought to have been told if there were things forbidden."

"Must I forbid your playing Punch and Judy, or dancing on the tight-rope?" cried Raymond, exasperated.

Cecil bit her lip, and treated the exclamation with the silent dignity of a deeply injured female; and thus they reached home, when Raymond said, "Come to your senses, Cecil, and apologize to my mother. You can explain that you did not know the extent of your powers."

"Certainly not. They all plotted against me, and I am the person to whom apology is due."

Wherewith she marched up stairs, leaving Raymond, horribly perplexed, to repair at once to his mother's room, where Frank still was; but after replying about his success in the examination, the younger brother retreated, preferring that his story should be told by his mother; but she had not so much as entered on it when Raymond demanded what had so much disturbed Cecil.

"I was afraid she would be vexed," said Mrs. Poynsett; "but we were in a difficulty. We thought she hardly knew what she had been led into, and that as she had invited her ladies, it would do less harm to change the character of the party than to try to get it given up."

"I have no doubt you did the best you could," said Raymond, speaking with more like censure of his

mother than he had ever done since the hot days of his love for Camilla Vivian; "and you could have had nothing to do with the personalities that seem to have been the sting."

Mrs. Poynsett, true boy-lover that she was, had been informed of the success of Tom's naughtiness —not indeed till after it was over, when there was nothing to be done but to shake her head and laugh; and now she explained so that her son came to a better understanding of what had happened.

As to the extinguishing Women's Rights in child's play, he saw that it had been a wise manœuvre of his mother, to spare any appearance of dissension, while preventing what she disapproved and what might have injured his interests; but he was much annoyed with the De Lanceys for having clogged the measure with their own folly; and judging of cause by effect, he would hear of no excuse for Rosamond or her brothers, and went away resolved that though nothing should induce him to quarrel with Julius, yet he should tell him plainly that he must restrain his wife and her brothers from annoying Cecil by their practical jokes. He was, as usual, perfectly gentle to his mother, and thanked her for her arrangement. "It was not her fault that it had not turned out better," he said; and he did not seem to hear her exoneration of Rosamond.

He had scarcely gone when Rosamond came in

from the village, asking whether he had arrived, as she had seen his hat in the hall.

"Yes, Rosamond. You did not tell me of Cecil's vexation!"

"Cecil? Have I seen her since? No, I remember now. But is she angry? Was it the dust-pan? Oh! Tom, Tom!"

"That and the Blockhead. Did Tom say anything very cutting?"

"Why it was an old stock charade they acted two years ago! I had better tell her so."

"If you would it would be an immense relief, my dear. Raymond is very much annoyed; she says she will speak to nobody till she has had an apology."

"Then she can be as great a goose as I! Why, the Yankee muse and Mrs. Duncombe took all in good part; but Cecil has not an atom of fun in her. Don't you think that was the gift the fairies left out at the christening of the all-endowed princess?"

Mrs. Poynsett laughed, but anxiously. "My dear, if you can make peace, it will be a family blessing."

"I! I'll eat any dirt in the world, and make Tom eat it too, rather than you should be vexed, or make discord in the house," cried Rosamond, kissing her, and speeding away to Cecil's door.

It was Raymond who opened it, looking perturbed and heated, but a good deal amazed at seeing his

intended scapegoat coming thus boldly to present herself.

"Let me in," she breathlessly said. "I am come to tell Cecil how sorry I am she was so much vexed; I really did not know it before."

"I am ready to accept any proper apology that is offered me," said Cecil, with cold dignity; "but I cannot understand your profession that you did not know I was vexed. You could have intended nothing else."

"But, Cecil, you misunderstood——" began Rosamond.

"I never misunderstand——"

"No human creature can say that!" interposed Raymond, immensely thankful to Rosamond—whatever her offence—for her overtures, and anxious they should be accepted.

"I could not," continued Cecil, "misunderstand the impertinent insults offered to my friends and to myself; though if Lady Rosamond is willing to acknowledge the impropriety I will overlook it."

Rosamond's face and neck crimsoned, but Raymond's presence helped her to rein in her temper; and she thought of Julius, and refrained from more than a "Very well. It was meant as a harmless joke, and—and if you—you did not take it so, I am very sorry."

Raymond saw the effort, and looked at his wife for softening; but as he saw none, he met the advance

by saying kindly, "I am sure it was so meant, though the moment was unfortunate."

"Indeed it was so," cried Rosamond, feeling it much easier to speak to him, and too generous to profess her own innocence and give up Tom. "It was just a moment's idle fancy—just as we've chaffed one another a hundred times; and for the Blockhead, it is the boys' pet old stock charade that they've acted scores of times. It was mere thoughtlessness; and I'll do or say anything Cecil pleases, if only she won't bother Julius or Mrs. Poynsett about our foolishness." And the mist of tears shone in the dark lashes as she held out her hand.

"I cannot suppose it mere thoughtlessness——" began Cecil; but Raymond cut her short with angry displeasure, of which she had not supposed him capable. "This is not the way to receive so kind an apology. Take Rosamond's hand, and respond properly."

To respond *properly* was as little in Cecil's power as her will; but she had not been an obedient daughter for so large a proportion of her life without having an instinct for the voice of real authority, and she did not refuse her hand, with the words, "If you express regret I will say no more about it."

And Rosamond, thinking of Julius and his mother, swallowed the ungraciousness, and saying "Thank you," turned to go away.

"Thank you most heartily for this, my dear Rosamond," said Raymond, holding out his hand as

he opened the door for her; "I esteem it a very great kindness."

Rosamond, as she felt the strong pressure of his hand, looked up in his face with a curious arch compassion in her great grey eyes. He shut the door behind her, and saw Cecil pouting by the mantelpiece, vexed at being forced into a reconciliation, even while she knew she could not persist in sending all the family except Frank to Coventry. He was thoroughly angry at the dogged way in which she had received this free and generous peace-making, and he could not but show it. "Well," he said, "I never saw an apology made with a better grace nor received with a worse one."

Cecil made no reply. He stood for a minute looking at her with eyes of wondering displeasure, then, with a little gesture of amazement, left the room.

Cecil felt like the drowning woman when she gave the last scissor-like gesture with her fingers. She was ready to fall into a chair and cry. A sense of desolateness was very strong on her, and that look in his dark eyes had seemed to blast her.

But pride came to her aid. Grindstone was moving about ready to dress her for dinner. No one should see that she was wounded, or that she took home displeasure which she did not merit. So she held up her head, and was chilling and dignified all dinner-time; after which she repaired to Lady Tyrrell's *conversazione.*

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MONSTROUS REGIMENT OF WOMEN.

"Descend, my muse!"

RAYMOND had been invited by one of his fellow-guests to make a visit at his house, and this was backed up on the morning after his return by a letter containing a full invitation to both himself and his wife. He never liked what he called "doing nothing in other people's houses," but he thought any sacrifice needful that might break up Cecil's present intimacies, and change the current of her ideas; and his mother fully agreed in thinking that it would be well to begin a round of visits, to last until the Session of Parliament should have begun. By the time it was over Julius and Rosamond would be in their own house, and it might be easier to make a new beginning.

The friends whom he could reckon on as sure to welcome him and his bride were political acquaintances of mark, far above the Dunstone range, and Cecil could not but be gratified, even while Mrs. Duncombe and her friend declared that they were

going to try to demoralize her by the seductions of aristocracy.

After all, Cecil was too much of an ingrained Charnock to be very deeply imbued with Women's Rights. All that she wanted was her own way, and opposition. Lady Tyrrell had fascinated her and secured her affection, and she followed her lead, which was rather that of calm curiosity and desire to hear the subject ventilated than actual partizanship, for which her ladyship was far too clever, as well as too secure in her natural supremacy. They had only seemed on that side because other people were so utterly alien to it, and because of their friendship with the really zealous Mrs. Duncombe.

The sanitary cause which had become mixed with it was, however, brought strongly before their minds by Mrs. Tallboys' final lecture, at which she impressed on the ladies' minds with great vehemence that here they might lead the way. If men would not act as a body, the ladies should set the example, and shame them, by each doing her very utmost in the cleansing of the nests of disease that reeked in the worn-out civilization of the cities of the old country. The ladies listened: Lady Tyrrell, with a certain interest in such an eager flow of eloquence; Eleonora, with thoughts far away. Bessie Duncombe expressed a bold practical determination to get one fragment, at least, of the work done, since she knew Pettitt, the hairdresser, was public-spirited enough to allow her to carry out

her ideas on his property, and Cecil, with her ample allowance, as yet uncalled for, in the abundance of her trousseau, promised to supply what the hair-dresser could not advance, as a tangible proof of her sincerity.

She held a little council with Mrs. Duncombe at the working society, when she resigned her day into that lady's hands on going away. "I shall ask Mrs. Miles Charnock," said that lady. "You don't object?"

"Oh no, only don't ask her till I'm gone, and you know she will only come on condition of being allowed to expound."

"We must have somebody, and now the thing has gone on so long, and will end in three months, the goody element will not do much harm, and, unluckily, most women will not act without it."

"You have been trying to train Miss Moy."

"I shall try still, but I can't get her to take interest in anything but the boisterous side of emancipation."

"I can't bear the girl," said Cecil; "I am sure she comes only for the sake of the horses."

"I'm afraid so; but she amuses Bob, and there's always a hope of moving her father through her, though she declares that the 'Three Pigeons' is his tenderest point, and that he had as soon meddle with it as with the apple of his eye. I suppose he gets a great rent from that Gadley."

"Do you really think you shall do anything with

her?" said Cecil, who might uphold her at home, but whose taste was outraged by her.

"I hope so! At any rate, she is not conventional. Why, when I was set free from my school at Paris, and married Bob three months later, I hadn't three ideas in my head beyond horses and balls and soldiers. It has all come with life and reading, my dear."

And a very odd "all" it was, so far; but there was this difference between Bessie Duncombe and Cecil Charnock Poynsett, that the "gospel of progress," was to the one the first she had ever really known, and became a reaching forward to a newly-perceived standard of benevolence and nobleness: to the other it was simply retrograding, and that less from conviction than from the spirit of rivalry and opposition.

Lady Tyrrell with her father and sister were likewise going to leave home, to stay among friends with whom Sir Harry could hunt until the London campaign, when Eleonora was to see the world. Thus the bazaar was postponed until the return of the ladies in the summer, when the preparations would be more complete and the season more suitable. The church must wait for it, for nothing like a sufficient amount of subscription had been as yet promised.

There was still, however, to come that select dinner-party at Mrs. Duncombe's, to which Julius, moved by her zeal and honesty, as well as by curiosity, had

promised his presence with Rosamond, "at his peril," as she said.

They were kept so long at the door of Aucuba Villa that they had begun to doubt if they had not mistaken the day, until the Sirenwood carriage crashed up behind them; and after the third pull at the bell they were admitted by an erect, alert figure,—a remnant of Captain Duncombe's military life.

He marshalled them into the drawing-room, where by dim firelight they could just discern the Professor and a certain good-natured horsey friend of the Captain's, who sprang up from easy-chairs on the opposite sides of the fire to greet them, while the man hastily stirred up the fire, lighted the gas, dashed at the table, shutting up an open blotting-book that lay on it, closing an ink-bottle, and gathering up some torn fragments of paper, which he would have thrown into the scrap-basket but that it was full of little books on the hundred ways of dressing a pumpkin. Then he gave a wistful look at the *ami de la maison*, as if commending the guests to him, and receiving a nod in return retired.

"I fear we are too early," said Lady Tyrrell.

"Fact is," said the familiar, whose name Julius was trying to remember, "there's been a catastrophe; cook forgot to order the turkey, went to bed last night in hysterics, and blew out the gas instead of turning it off. No, no"—as the guests, expecting fatal consequences, looked as if they thought they had better

remove themselves: "she came round, and Duncombe has driven over to Backsworth to bring home the dinner. He'll soon be back."

This not appearing greatly to reassure the visitors, the Professor added, "No, no, ladies. Mrs. Duncombe charged me to say that she will be perfectly fixed in a short time, and I flatter myself that my wife is equal to any emergency."

"It is very kind in her," said Lady Tyrrell.

"I confess," said Professor Tallboys, "that I am not sorry that such an occasion should occur of showing an American lady's domestic powers. I flatter myself they do not discredit her cause."

Just then were heard the wheels of the drag, and in rushed one of the boys, grasping Eleonora's skirts, and proclaiming, "We've got the grub! Oysters and a pie! Oh my!"

"Satisfactory!" said the friend. "But let go, Ducky, you are rumpling Miss Vivian."

"She's coming to see the quarion! You promised, Lena! Here's a jolly crayfish! He'll pinch!"

There was a small conservatory or glazed niche on one side of the room, into which the boy dragged Lenore, and Julius followed, dimly sensible of what the quarion might be, and hoping for a word with the young lady, while he trusted to his wife to occupy her sister.

The place contained two desolate camellias, with leaves in the same proportion as those on trees in the

earlier ages of illumination, and one scraggy, leafless geranium, besides a green and stagnant tank, where a goldfish moved about, flapping and gasping, as the boy disturbed it in his search for the crayfish. He absorbed all the conversation, so that Julius could only look back into the room, where an attempt at artistic effect was still dimly visible through accumulated litter. The Venus of Milo stood on a bracket, with a riding-whip in her arms, and a bundle of working society tickets behind her, and her *vis-à-vis*, the Faun of Praxiteles, was capped by a glove with one finger pointing upwards, and had a ball of worsted tangled about his legs; but further observation was hindered by the man-servant's voice at the outer door, "Master Ducky, where are you? Your Ma says you are to go to bed directly."

"No, no, I'll put myself to bed!"

"Come, sir, please do, like a good boy—Master Pinney won't go without you, and I must put him to bed while they are dishing up. Come, sir, I've got a mince pie for you."

"And some oysters—Bobby said I should have some oysters!"

"Yes, yes; come along, sir."

And Master Ducky submitted to his fate, while Julius looked his wonder, and asked "Is he nursery-maid?"

"Just now, since the bonne went," said Lenore. "He is a most faithful, attached servant, who will do

anything for them. *She* does attach pe
when the first shock is over."

"I am coming to believe so," he answer
seem to me to be excellent elements."

"I am so glad!" said Lenore; "she is
so true and frank; and much of this
really an inconsistent struggle to keep ou

"Well! at any rate I am thankful to
opportunity of seeing you," said Julius.
both been longing to speak our welcome

"Thank you. It is so kind," she fervently
"all the kinder for the state of things tha
on—though you know that it can make n
ence," she added, apparently addressing t

"Frank knows it," said Julius, in a low

"I trust he does, though I cannot see h
him—you will?" she added, looking up
shy brightness in her eye and a flush on

"Yes, indeed!" he said, laying his h
for a moment. "I fear you may both
to pull through, but I think you are o
safety."

so—I think I am, for none o
ever to change, except that
id, bitterer."

stand your feeling that fo
could, and would help m
if I may."

hand on his, say

longed to talk openly to you ever since we met in the cow-shed; but I could not make any advance to any of you, because," she whispered in haste, "I thought it my duty to hold back from Frank. And now, till we go away, Camilla watches me and occupies me every minute, will not even let me ride out with Papa. I wonder she lets me talk to you now."

"We know each other," said Julius shortly.

It was so. Once, in the plain-spoken days of childhood, Miles and Julius had detected Camilla Vivian in some flagrant cheating at a game, and had roundly expressed their opinion. In the subsequent period of Raymond's courtship, Miles had succumbed to the fascination, but Julius had given one such foil, that she had never again attempted to cajole him.

"I have seen that you did from the first," said Lenore. "And it would make it much easier to talk to you than to any outsider, who would never understand, even if it were possible for me to explain, how hard it is to see which way my duty lies—especially filial."

"Do you mean in general, or in this special matter?"

"Both. You see, in her hands he is so different from what he was before she came home, that I don't feel as if I was obeying him—only her; and I don't think I am bound to do that. Not in the great matter, I am clear. Nobody can meddle with my real sincere pledge of myself to Frank, nobody!" she spoke as if there was iron in her lips. "But as far as overt acts

go, they have a right to forbid me, till I am of age at least, and we must bear it."

"Yes, you are right there."

"But there are thousands of other little cases of right and wrong, and altogether I have come to such a spirit of opposition that I find it easier to resist than to do anything with a good grace."

"You cannot always tell when resistance is principle, and when temper or distaste."

"There's distaste enough always," said poor Lenore.

"To gaieties?" he said, amazed as one habituated to his wife's ravenous appetite for any sort of society or amusement.

"Of course," she answered sadly. "A great deal of trouble just for a little empty babble. Often not one word worth remembering, and a general sense of having been full of bad feelings."

"No enjoyment?" he asked in surprise.

"Only by the merest chance and exception," she answered, surprised at his surprise; "what is there to enjoy?"

The peculiar-looking clergyman might have seemed more likely to ask such a question than the beautiful girl, but he looked at her anxiously and said, "Don't nourish morbid dislike and contempt, my dear Lena, it is not a safeguard. There are such things as perilous reactions. Try to weigh justly, and be grateful for kindness, and to like what is likeable."

At that moment, after what had been an interval of weary famine to all but these two, host and hostess appeared, the lady as usual, picturesque, though in the old black silk, with a Roman sash tied transversely, and holly in her hair; and gaily shaking hands—"That's right, Lady Rosamond; so you are trusted here! Your husband hasn't sent you to represent him?"

"I'm afraid his confidence in me did not go so far," said Rosamond.

"Ah! I see—Lady Tyrrell, how d'ye do—you've brought Lena? Well, Rector, are you prepared?"

"That depends on what you expect of me."

"Have you the convinceable spot in your mind?"

"We must find it. It is very uncommon, and indurates very soon, so we had better make the most of our opportunity," said the American lady, who had entered as resplendent as before, though in so different a style that Rosamond wondered how such a wardrobe could be carried about the world; and the sporting friend muttered, "Stunning! she has been making kickshaws all day, and looks as if she came out of a bandbox! If all women were like that, it might pay."

It was true. Mrs. Tallboys was one of those women of resource whose practical powers may well inspire the sense of superiority, and with the ease and confidence of her country.

The meal was a real success. That some portion

had been procured, ready dressed, at Backsworth, was evident, but all that had been done at home had a certain piquant Transatlantic flavour, in which the American Muse could be detected; and both she and her husband were polished, lively, and very agreeable, in spite of the twang in their voices. Miss Moy, the Captain and his friend, talked horses at one end of the table, and Rosamond faltered her woman's horror for the rights of her sex, increased by this supposed instance.

When the ladies rose at dessert, Mrs. Duncombe summoned him, "Come, Rector!—come, Professor! you're not to sit over your wine."

"We rise so far above the ordinary level of manhood!" said Julius, obediently rising.

"Once for all, Mr. Charnock," said Mrs. Duncombe, turning on him with flashing eyes and her Elizabethan majesty, "if you come prepared to scoff, we can have nothing to do with you."

Rosamond's eyes looked mischievous, and her brow cocked, but Julius answered in earnest, "Really, I assure you I have not come in a spirit of sarcasm; I am honestly desirous of hearing your arguments."

"Shall I stay in your stead?" added Miss Moy. "They'll be much more amusing here!"

"Come, Gussie, you're on your good behaviour," said Mrs. Duncombe. "Bob kept you to learn the right way of making a sensation."

As they entered the drawing-room two more guests

arrived, namely, Joanna Bowater, and Herbert, who walked in with a kind of grim submission, till he saw Lady Tyrrell, when he lighted up, and, on a little gracious gesture with her hand, he sat down on the sofa beside her; and was there solaced by an occasional remark in an undertone; for indeed the boy was always in a trance wherever she was, and she had a fair amount of by-play wherewith to entertain herself and him during the discussion.

"You are just in time, Jenny," said Rosamond; "the great question is going to be started."

"And it is——?"

"The Equality of the Sexes," pronounced Mrs. Duncombe.

"*Ex cathedrâ?*" said Julius, as the graceful Muse seated herself in a large red arm-chair. "This scene is not an easy one in which to dispute it."

"You see, Bessie," said Mrs. Tallboys, "that men are so much afraid of the discussion that they try to elude it with empty compliment, under which is couched a covert sneer."

"Perhaps," returned Julius, "we might complain that we can't open our lips without compliments and sneers being detected when we were innocent of both."

"Were you?" demanded Mrs. Tallboys.

"Honestly, I was looking round and thinking the specimens before us would tell in your favour."

"What a gallant Parson!" cried Miss Moy.

But a perfect clamour broke out from others.

"Julius, that's too bad! when you know——"

"Mr. Charnock, you are quite mistaken. Bob is much cleverer than I, in his own line——"

"Quite true, Rector," affirmed Herbert; "Joan has more brains than all the rest of us—for a woman, I mean."

"For a woman!" repeated Mrs. Tallboys. "Let a human being do or be what she will, it is disposed of in a moment by that one verdict, 'Very well for a woman'!"

"How is it with the decision of posterity?" said Jenny. "Can you show any work of woman of equal honour and permanence with that of men?"

"Because her training has been sedulously inferior."

"Not always," said Jenny; "not in Italy in the cinque cento, nor in England under Elizabeth."

"Yes, and there were names——!"

"Names, yes, but that is all. The lady's name is remembered for the curiosity of her having equalled the ordinary poet or artist of her time, but her performances either are lost or only known to curious scholars. They have not the quality which makes things permanent."

"What do you say to Sappho?"

"There is nothing of her but a name, and fragments that curious scholars read."

"Worse luck to her if she invented Sapphics," added Herbert.

"One of womankind's torments for mankind, eh?" said his neighbour.

"And there are plenty more such," asserted Mrs. Duncombe boldly (for these were asides). "It is only that one can't recollect—and the men have suppressed them."

"I think men praised them," said Jenny, "and that we remember the praise, not the works. For instance, Roswitha, or Olympia Morata, or Vittoria Colonna. Vittoria's sonnets are extant, but we only value them as being hers, more for what she *was* than for their intrinsic merit."

"And," added Eleonora, "men did not suppress Hannah More, or Joanna Baillie. You know Scott thought Miss Baillie's dramas would rank with Shakespeare's."

Mrs. Tallboys was better read in logic and mathematics than in history, and did not follow Jenny, but she turned her adversary's argument to her own advantage, by exclaiming, "Are the gentlemen present familiar with these bright lights?"

"I confess my ignorance of some of them," said Julius.

"But my youngest brother knows all that," said Rosamond, at a brave venture.

"Macaulay's schoolboy," murmured Lady Tyrrell softly.

"Let us return to the main point," said Mrs. Tallboys, a little annoyed. "It is of the present and future that I would speak, not of the past."

"Does not the past give the only data on which to form a conclusion?" said Julius.

"Certainly not. The proposition is not what a woman or two in her down-trodden state may have exceptionally effected, but her natural equality, and in fact superiority, in all but the physical strength which has imposed an unjust bondage on the higher nature."

"I hardly know where to meet you if you reject all arguments from proved facts," said Julius.

"And the Bible. Why don't you say the Bible?" exclaimed his wife in an undertone; but Mrs. Tallboys took it up and said, "The precepts of Scripture are founded on a state of society passed away. You may find arguments for slavery there."

"I doubt that," said Julius. "There are practical directions for an existing state of things, which have been distorted into sanction for its continuance. The actual precepts are broad principles, which are for all times, and apply to the hired servant as well as to the slave. So again with the relations of man and wife; I can nowhere find a command so adapted to the seclusion and depression of the Eastern woman as to be inapplicable to the Christian matron. And the typical virtuous woman, the valiant woman, is one of the noblest figures anywhere depicted."

"I know," said Mrs. Tallboys, who had evidently been waiting impatiently again to declaim, "that men, even ministers of religion, from Paul if you like downwards, have been willing enough to exalt woman

so long as they claim to sit above her. The higher the oppressed, so much higher the self-exaltation of the oppressor. Paul and Peter exalt their virtuous woman, but only as their own appendage, adorning themselves; and while society with religious ministers at the head of it call on woman to submit, and degrade the sex, we shall continue to hear of such disgraces to England as I see in your police reports—brutal mechanics beating their wives."

"I fear while physical force is on the side of the brute," said Julius, "no abstract recognition of equality would save her."

"Society would take up her cause, and protect her."

"So it is willing to do now, if she asks for protection."

"Yes," broke in Rosamond, "but nothing would induce a woman worth sixpence to take the law against her husband."

"There I think Lady Rosamond has at once demonstrated the higher nature of the woman," said Mrs. Tallboys. "What man would be capable of such generosity?"

"No one denies," said Julius, "that generous forbearance, patience, fortitude, and self-renunciation, belong almost naturally to the true wife and mother, and are her great glory; but would she not be stripped of them by self-assertion as the peer in power?"

"Turning our flank again with a compliment," said

Mrs. Duncombe. "These fine qualities are very convenient to yourselves, and so you praise them up."

"Not so!" returned Julius, "because they are really the higher virtues."

"Patience!" at once exclaimed the American and English emancipators with some scorn.

"Yes," said Julius, in a low tone of thorough earnest. "The patience of strength and love is the culmination of virtue."

Jenny knew what was in his mind, but Mrs. Tallboys, with a curious tone, half pique, half triumph, said, "You acknowledge this which you call the higher nature in woman—that is to say, all the passive qualities—and you are willing to allow her a finer spiritual essence, and yet you do not agree to her equal rights. This is the injustice of the prejudice which has depressed her all these centuries."

"Stay," broke in Jenny, evidently not to the lady's satisfaction. "That does not state the question. Nobody denies that woman is often of a higher and finer essence, as you say, than man, and has some noble qualities in a higher degree than any but the most perfect men; but that is not the question. It is whether she have more force and capacity than man, is in fact actually able to be on an equality."

"And, I say," returned Mrs. Tallboys, "that man has used brute force to cramp woman's intellect and energy so long, that she has learnt to acquiesce in her position, and to abstain from exerting herself, so that

it is only where she is partially emancipated, as in my own country, that any idea of her powers can be gained."

"I am afraid," said Julius, "that more may be lost to the world than is gained! No; I am not speaking from the tyrant point of view. I am thinking whether free friction with the world may not lessen that sweetness and tender innocence and purity that make a man's home an ideal and a sanctuary—his best earthly influence."

"This is only sentiment. Innocence is worthless if it cannot stand alone and protect itself!" said Mrs. Tallboys.

"I do not mean innocence unable to stand alone. It should be strong and trustworthy, but should have the bloom on it still, not rubbed off by contact or knowledge of evil. Desire of shielding that bloom from the slightest breath of contamination is no small motive for self-restraint, and therefore a great preservative to most men."

"Women purify the atmosphere wherever they go," said the lady.

"Many women do," returned Julius; "but will they retain that power universally if they succeed in obtaining a position where there will be less consideration for them, and they must be exposed to a certain hardening and roughening process?"

"If so," exclaimed Mrs. Tallboys, "if men are so base, we would soon assert ourselves. We are no

frail morning glories for you to guard and worship with restraint, lest forsooth your natural breath should wither us away."

As she spoke the door opened, and, with a strong reek of tobacco, in came the two other gentlemen. "Well, Rector, have you given in?" asked the Captain. "Is Lady Rosamond to mount the pulpit henceforth?"

"Ah! wouldn't I preach you a sermon," returned Rosamond.

"To resume," said Mrs. Tallboys, sitting very upright. "You still go on the old assumption that woman was made for you. It is all the same story: one man says she is for his pleasure, another for his servant, and you, for—for his refinement. You would all have us adjectives. Now I defy you to prove that woman is not a substantive, created for herself."

"If you said 'growed,' Mrs. Tallboys, it would be more consistent," said Jenny. "Her creation and her purpose in the world stand upon precisely the same authority."

"I wonder at you, Miss Bowater," said Mrs. Tallboys. "I cannot understand a woman trying to depreciate her sex."

"No," thrust in Gussie Moy; "I want to know why a woman can't go about without a dowager waddling after her." ("Thank you," breathed Lady Tyrrell into Herbert's ear), "nor go to a club."

"There was such a club proposed in London," said

Captain Duncombe, "and do you know, Gussie, the name of it?"

"No!"

"The Middlesex Club!"

"There! it is just as Mrs. Tallboys said; you will do nothing but laugh at us, or else talk sentiment about our refining you. Now, I want to be free to amuse myself."

"I don't think those trifling considerations will be great impediments in your way," said Lady Tyrrell in her blandest tone. "Is that actually the carriage? Thank you, Mrs. Tallboys. This is good-bye, I believe. I am sorry there has not been more time for a fuller exposition to-night."

"There would have been, but I never was so interrupted," said Mrs. Tallboys in an undertone, with a displeased look at Jenny at the other end of the room.

Declamation was evidently more the Muse's forte than argument, but her aside was an aside, and that of the jockey friend was not. "So you waited for us to give your part of the lecture, Miss Moy?"

"Of course. What's the use of talking to a set of women and parsons, who are just the same?"

Poor Herbert's indignant flush infinitely amused the party who were cloaking in the hall. "Poor Gussie; her tongue runs fast," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"Emancipated!" said Jenny. "Good-bye, Mrs. Duncombe. Please let us be educated up to our privileges before we get them."

"A Parthian shot, Jenny," said Julius, as they gave her a homeward lift in the carriage. "You proved yourself the fittest memberess for the future parliament to-night."

"To be elected by the women and parsons," said Jenny, with a little chuckle of fun. "Poor Herbert!"

"I only wish that girl was a man that I might horsewhip her," was the clerical sentiment growled out from Herbert's corner of the carriage. "Degradation of her sex! She's a standing one!"

CHAPTER XX.

VIVIENNE.

"Of all the old women that ever I saw,
Sweet bad luck to my mother-in-law."
Irish Song.

THE Parliamentary Session had reached the stage that is ended by no power save that of grouse, and the streets were full of vans fantastically decorated with baths, chairs, bedsteads, and nursery gear.

Cecil could see two before different house-doors as she sat behind her muslin curtains, looking as fresh and healthful as ever, and scarcely more matronly, except that her air of self-assertion had become more easy and less aggressive now that she was undisputed mistress of the house in London.

There was no concern on her part that she was not the mother of either of the two latest scions of the house of Charnock. Certainly she did not like to be outdone by Rosamond; but then it was only a girl, and she could afford to wait for the son and heir; indeed, she did not yet desire him at the cost of all the distinguished and intellectual society, the concerts,

soirées, and lectures that his non-arrival left her free to enjoy. The other son and heir interested her nearly, for he was her half-brother. There had been something almost ludicrous in the apologies to her. His mother seemed to feel like a traitor to her, and Mr. Charnock could hardly reconcile his darling's deposition with his pride in the new-comer. Both she and Raymond had honestly rejoiced in their happiness and the continuance of the direct line of Dunstone, and had completed the rejoicing of the parents by thorough sympathy, when the party with this unlooked-for addition had returned home in the spring. Mr. Charnock had insisted on endowing his daughter as largely as he justly could, to compensate for this change in her expectations, and was in doubt between Swanmore, an estate on the Backsworth side of Willansborough, and Sirenwood itself, to purchase and settle on her. Raymond would greatly have preferred Sirenwood, both from its adjoining the Compton property and as it would be buying out the Vivians; but there were doubts about the involvements, and nothing could be done till Eleonora's majority. Mr. Charnock preferred Swanmore as an investment, and Raymond could, of course, not press his wishes.

A short visit had been made at Dunstone to join in the festivities in honour of the little heir, but Cecil had not been at Compton since Christmas, though Raymond had several times gone home for a Sunday

when she had other companionship. Charlie had been with them preparing his outfit for India, whither he had been gone about a month; and Frank, though living in lodgings, was the more frequently at his sister-in-law's service, because wherever she was the Vivian sisters might be looked for.

No sooner had Raymond taken the house in —— Square than Lady Tyrrell had engaged the opposite one, so that one household could enjoy evening views of the other's interior, and Cecil had chiefly gone into society under her friend's auspices. Her presentation at Court had indeed been by the marchioness; she had been staying with an old friend of Mrs. Poynsett's, quite prepared to be intimate with Raymond Poynsett's wife, if only Cecil would have taken to her. But that lady's acceptance of anyone recommended in this manner was not to be thought of, and besides, the family were lively, merry people, and Cecil was one of those who dislike and distrust laughter, lest it should be at themselves. So she remained on coldly civil terms with that pleasant party, and though to a certain degree following her husband's lead as to her engagements, all her ways were moulded by her friend's influence. Nor was the effect otherwise than becoming. Nothing could be in better taste than all in Mrs. Charnock Poynsett's establishment, and London and Lady Tyrrell together had greatly improved her manners. All her entertainments went off well, and she filled

her place in the world with grace and skill, just as she had always figured herself doing.

Yet there was a sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction, which increased upon her as the time drew nearer for returning to be again only a guest in her married home. It was a tangible grievance on which her mind could fix itself. Surely it was hard on her that her husband should require it of her, and yet she perceived that he could not avoid it, since his mother was mistress. She knew too that he was unfailingly kind, attentive, and indulgent, except on that one occasion when he had sharply reproved her for her behaviour in the Tallboys matter; and strange to say, a much stronger feeling towards him had been setting in ever since that one time when she had seen him thoroughly angry. She longed and craved to stir that even, gentle courtesy, to frowns or smiles; and yet there was a perversity in her nature that seemed to render it impossible to her to attempt to win a smile from him, far more so to lay aside any device or desire of her own to gratify him. All she did know was, that to be all that her ambition had sought, a Charnock by marriage as well as birth, and with a kind, considerate husband, was not enough to hinder a heart-sickness she had never known or supposed possible.

Presently, through the flowers in her balcony, Cecil saw the opening and closing of the opposite house-door, and a white parasol unfurled, and she had only

time to finish and address her letter to Mrs. Duncombe before Lady Tyrrell was announced.

"Here I am after a hard morning's work, winding up accounts, &c."

"You go to-morrow?"

"Yes, trusting that you will soon follow; though you might be a cockney born, your bloom is town-proof."

"We follow as soon as the division on the Education Question is over, and that will not be for ten days. You are come to look at my stores for the bazaar; but first, what are you going to do this afternoon?"

"What are your plans?"

"I must leave cards at half-a-dozen people's at the other end of the park. Will you come with me? Where is Lenore?"

"She is gone to take leave of the Strangeways' party; Lady Susan insisted on having her for this last day. Poor Frank! I confess impartially that it does not look well for him."

"Poor Frank!" repeated Cecil, "he does look very forlorn when he hears where she is."

"When, after all, if the silly boy could only see it, it is the most fortunate thing that could happen to him, and the only chance of keeping his head above water. I have made Lady Susan promise me two of her daughters for the bazaar. They thoroughly know how to make themselves useful. Oh, how pretty!"

For Cecil was producing from the shelves of various pieces of furniture a large stock of fancy articles—Swiss carvings, Spa toys, Genevese ornaments, and Japanese curiosities, which, as Lady Tyrrell said, "rivalled her own accumulation, and would serve to carry off the housewives and pen-wipers on which all the old maids of Wilsbro' were employed."

"We must put out our programmes," Cecil added; "people will not work in earnest till the day is fixed and they know the sellers."

"Yes; the lady patronesses are most important," said Lady Tyrrell, writing them down; "Mrs. Raymond Charnock Poynsett; Lady Rosamond, eh?"

"Oh no, Julius won't hear of it."

"And opposition is sweet: so we lose her romantic name, and the stall of the three brides. Mrs. Miles Charnock is too much out of the world to be worth asking. Then myself—Mrs. Duncombe, Mrs. Fuller, as a matter of necessity, Mrs. Moy."

"Oh!"

"Needful, my dear, to propitiate that set. Also that mayoress, Mrs. Truelove, isn't she? Six. We'll fill up with country people."

Six more distinguished names were soon supplied of ladies who would give their patronage, provided neither toil nor care was required of them; and still consulting, the two friends took their seats in the carriage. The time of the bazaar was to be fixed by the opening of the town-hall, which was to take place

on the 12th of September—a Thursday, the week before the races; and the most propitious days appeared to be the Tuesday and Wednesday before the Great Backsworth Cup Day, since the world would then be in an excited, pleasure-seeking state, favourable to their designs.

"I shall have a party in the house," said Lady Tyrrell: "shall you be able?"

"I can't tell; you know it does not depend on me, and I certainly shall not ask it as a favour. Camilla, did I tell you that I tried to make my father understand the state of things, and speak to Raymond? But he would only say, that while I am so young and inexperienced, it is a great advantage for me to live with Mrs. Poynsett, and that I must be the greatest comfort to her. Papa is an intense believer in Mrs. Poynsett, and when he once has taken up a notion nothing will convince him."

"You can't even make capital of this purchase of a house of your own?"

"I don't like to do that."

"My dear, I see your delicacy and forbearance, and I would not urge you, if I did not see how deeply your happiness is concerned. Of course I don't mean merely the authority over the *wirthschaft*, though somehow the cares of it are an ingredient in female contentment; but forgive me, Cecil, I am certain that you will never take your right place—where you care for it more—till you have a home of your own."

"Ah!" The responsive sound burst from the very depths of Cecil's heart, penetrated as they had never been before; but pride and reserve at once sprang up, and she answered coldly, "I have no reason to complain."

"Right, my dear Cecil, I like you the better;" and she pressed her hand.

"It is quite true," said Cecil, withdrawing hers.

"Quite, absolutely true. He would die rather than give you any reason for the slightest murmur; but Cecil, dearest, that very heedfulness shows there is something he cannot give you."

"I don't know why you should say so," answered a proud but choked voice.

"I say so," replied the clear tones, firmly, though with a touch of pity, "because I see it. Cecil, poor child, they married you very young!"

"I missed nothing," exclaimed Cecil; but she felt that she could only say so in the past, and her eyes burnt with unshed tears.

"No, my dear, you were still a girl, and your deeper woman's heart had not grown to perceive that it was not met."

"He chose me," she faintly said.

"His mother needed a daughter. It was proper for him to marry, and you were the most eligible party. I will answer for it that he warned you how little he could give."

"He did," cried Cecil. "He did tell me that he

could not begin in freshness and warmth, like a young man; but I thought it only meant that we were too sensible to care about nonsense, and liked him for it. He always must have been staid and reserved—he could never have been different, Camilla. Don't smile in that way! Tell me what you mean."

"My dear Cecil, I knew Raymond Poynsett a good many years before you did."

"And—well? Then he had a first love?" said Cecil, in a voice schooled into quiet. "Was he different then? Was he as desperate as poor Frank is now?"

"Frank is a very mild copy of him at that age. He overbore everyone, wrung consent from all, and did everything but overcome his mother's calm hostility and self-assertion."

"Did that stop it? She died of course," said Cecil. "She could not have left off loving him."

"She did not die, but her family were wearied out by the continual objections to their overtures, and the supercilious way of treating them. They thought it a struggle of influence, and that he was too entirely dominated for a daughter-in-law to be happy with her. So they broke it off."

"And she——" Cecil looked up with searching eyes.

"She had acutely felt the offence, the weakness, the dutifulness, whatever you may choose to call it, and in the rebound she married."

"Who is she?" gasped Cecil.

"It is not fair to tell you," was the gentle answer,

with a shade of rebuke. "You need not look for her. She is not in the county."

"I hope I shall never see her!"

"You need not dread doing so if you can only have fair play, and establish the power that belongs rightly to you. She would have no chance with you, even if he had forgiven her."

"Has not he?"

"Never!"

"And he used up all his heart?" said Cecil in a low, musing tone.

"All but what his mother absorbed. She was a comparatively young and brilliant woman, and she knew her power. It is a great ascendency, and only a man's honest blindness could suppose that any woman would be content under it."

Cecil's tongue refused to utter what oppressed her heart — those evenings beside the sofa, those eager home expeditions for Sunday, the uniform maintenance of his mother's supremacy.

"And you think absence from her would lessen her influence?"

"I am sure of it. There might be a struggle, but if I know Mr. Charnock Poynsett rightly, he is too upright not to be conscious of what is due to you, and be grieved not to be able to give you more—that is, when his mother is not holding him in her grasp. Nor can there be any valid objection, since Mrs. Miles Charnock is always at her service."

"She will return to Africa. I don't know why she and Rosamond have been always so much more acceptable."

"They are not her rivals; besides, they have not your strength. She is a woman who tries to break whatever she cannot bend, and the instant her son began to slip from her grasp the contest necessarily began. You had much better have it over once and for ever, and have him on your side. Insist on a house of your own, and when you have made your husband happy in it, then, then—Ah! Good morning—Sir George!"

She had meant to say, "Then you win his heart," but the words would not come, and a loathing hatred of the cold-hearted child who had a property in Raymond so mastered her that she welcomed the interruption, and did not return to the subject.

She knew when she had said enough, and feared to betray herself; nor could Cecil bear to resume the talk, stunned and sore as she was at the revelation, though with no suspicion that the speaker had been the object of her husband's affection. She thought it must have been the other sister, now in India, and that this gave the key to many allusions she had heard and which she marvelled at herself for not having understood. The equivocation had entirely deceived her, and she little thought she had been taking counsel with the rival who was secretly triumphing in Raymond's involuntary constancy, and sowing seeds of vengeance against an ancient enemy.

She could not settle to anything when she came home. Life had taken a new aspect. Hitherto she had viewed herself as born to all attention and deference, and had taken it as a right, and now she found herself the victim of a *mariage de convenance* to a man of exhausted affections, who meant her only to be the attendant of his domineering mother. The love that was dawning in her heart did but add poignancy to the bitterness of the revelation, and fervour to her resolve to win the mastery over the heart which was her lawful possession.

She was restless till his return. She was going to an evening party, and though usually passive as to dress, she was so changeable and difficult to satisfy that Grindstone grew cross, and showed it by stern, rigid obedience. And Cecil well knew that Grindstone, who was in authority in the present house, hated the return to be merely the visitor of Alston and Jenkins.

In the drawing-room Cecil fluttered from book to window, window to piano again, throwing down her occupation at every sound and taking up another; and when at last Raymond came in, his presence at first made her musings seem mere fancies.

Indeed it would have been hard to define what was wanting in his manner. He lamented his unavoidable delay, and entertained her with all the political and parliamentary gossip he had brought home, and which she always much enjoyed as a

tribute to her wisdom, so much that it had been an entire, though insensible cure for the Rights of Woman. Moreover he was going with her to this "drum," though he would greatly have preferred the debate, and was to be summoned in case of a division. She knew enough of the world to be aware that such an attentive and courteous husband was not the rule. But what was courtesy to one who longed for unity?

"Is Frank to be there this evening?" he asked.

"Yes, I believe so."

"I thought he was to have gone with us."

"He told me not to depend on him. He had made an engagement to ride into the country with Sir Harry Vivian." And she added, though the proud spirit so hated what seemed to her like making an advance that it sounded like a complaint, "So you can't avoid going with me?"

"I should any way have gone with you, but I may have to leave you to Frank to see you away," he said. "And I had rather have Frank here than with that set."

"Breaking up one of our few *tête-à-tête* evenings, and they are becoming few enough!"

This murmur gratified him, and he said, "We shall be more alone together now. The Rectory is almost ready, and Julius means to move in another week, and I suppose Miles will carry Anne off before the year is over."

"Yes, we are the only ones with no home."

"Rather, we hold fast to the old home."

"Not my old home."

"Does not mine become yours?"

"Not while——." She paused and started afresh. "Raymond, could we not live at Swanslea, if it is bought for us?"

"Swanslea! Five miles off! Impossible."

Cecil was silent.

"My dear Cecil," he said, after a few moments' consideration, "I can understand that you felt unfortunately crowded last year, but all that is over, and you must see that we are necessary to my mother, and that all my duties require me to live at home."

"You could attend to the property from Swanslea."

"The property indeed! I meant my mother!"

"She has Anne."

"Anne will soon be in Africa—even if she were more of a companion. I am sorry it is a trial to you; for my proper place is clearly with my mother, the more in her helpless state, and with my brothers gone out into the world. Now that the numbers are smaller, you will find it much easier to take the part that I most earnestly wish should be yours."

"I cannot get on with her."

"Do not say so! Do not think so! To have Rosamond there with her Irish ease, and her reserve kept you in the background before; I saw it, but I could not help it; and now there will be no hindrance to your drawing together. There is nothing I so desire."

If the carriage had not stopped as he spoke Cecil would not have uttered the thought that smote her, namely, that his desire was on behalf, not of his wife, but of his mother, to whom he was ready to sacrifice her happiness without a pang. She did not see that he could imagine no greater happiness for her than a thorough love of his mother.

They certainly were not the happiest couple present as they walked up-stairs, looking like a model husband and wife, with their name echoing from landing to landing.

If any expression savouring of slang could possibly be applied to Raymond, he might be said to be struck all of a heap by his wife's proposition. He had never even thought of the possibility of making a home anywhere but at Compton Poynsett, or of his wife wishing that he should do so; and proverbial sayings about the incompatibility of relatives-in-law suddenly assumed a reasonableness that he could not bear to remember.

But his courtesy and sense of protection, trained by a woman of the old school, would not suffer him to relax his attention to his wife. Though he was very anxious to get back to the house, he would not quit her neighbourhood till he had found Frank and entrusted her to him.

He was not happy about Frank. The youth was naturally of an intellectual and poetical temperament and had only cared for horses and field-sports as

any healthy lad growing up in a country house must enjoy them; and Raymond had seen him introduced to the style of men whom he thought would be thoroughly congenial to him, and not unlikely to lead him on to make a mark in the world.

But that unfortunate Vivian attachment stood in the way; Sir Harry and his elder daughter ignored it entirely, but did not forbid Frank the house; though Lady Tyrrell took care, as only she could do, that Eleonora should never have ten minutes' private conversation with him, either at home or abroad. Even in a crowd, a ball, or garden-party, the vigilant sister had her means of breaking into any kind of confidence; and Frank was continually tantalized by the pursuit. It could not but unsettle him, and draw him into much more gaiety than was compatible with the higher pursuits his mother had expected of him; and what was worse, it threw him into Sir Harry Vivian's set, veteran *roués*, and younger men who looked up to their knowingness and listened to their good stories.

What amount of harm it was doing Raymond could not guess. He had known it all himself, and had escaped unscathed, but he did not fear the less for his younger brother, and he only hoped that the inducement to mingle with such society would be at an end before Frank had formed a taste for the habits that there prevailed.

Eleonora Vivian had been much admired at first, but her cold manner kept everyone at a distance, and

her reserve was hardly ever seen to relax. However, her one friendship with the Strangeways family gave Raymond hopes that her constancy was not proof against the flattering affection, backed by wealth, that seemed to await her there. The best he could wish for Frank was that the infatuation might be over as soon as possible, though he pitied the poor fellow sincerely when he saw him, as he did to-night, waiting with scarcely concealed anxiety while Miss Vivian stood listening to a long discourse about yachting from an eager pair of chattering girls.

Then some break occurred, and Frank moved up to her. "Your last evening! How little I have seen of you!"

"Little indeed!"

"I called, but you were at the Strangeways."

"They are very kind to me. When is your holiday?"

"Not till spring, but I may get a few days in the autumn: you will be at home?"

"As far as I know."

"If I thought for a moment you cared to see me; but you have shown few signs of wishing it of late."

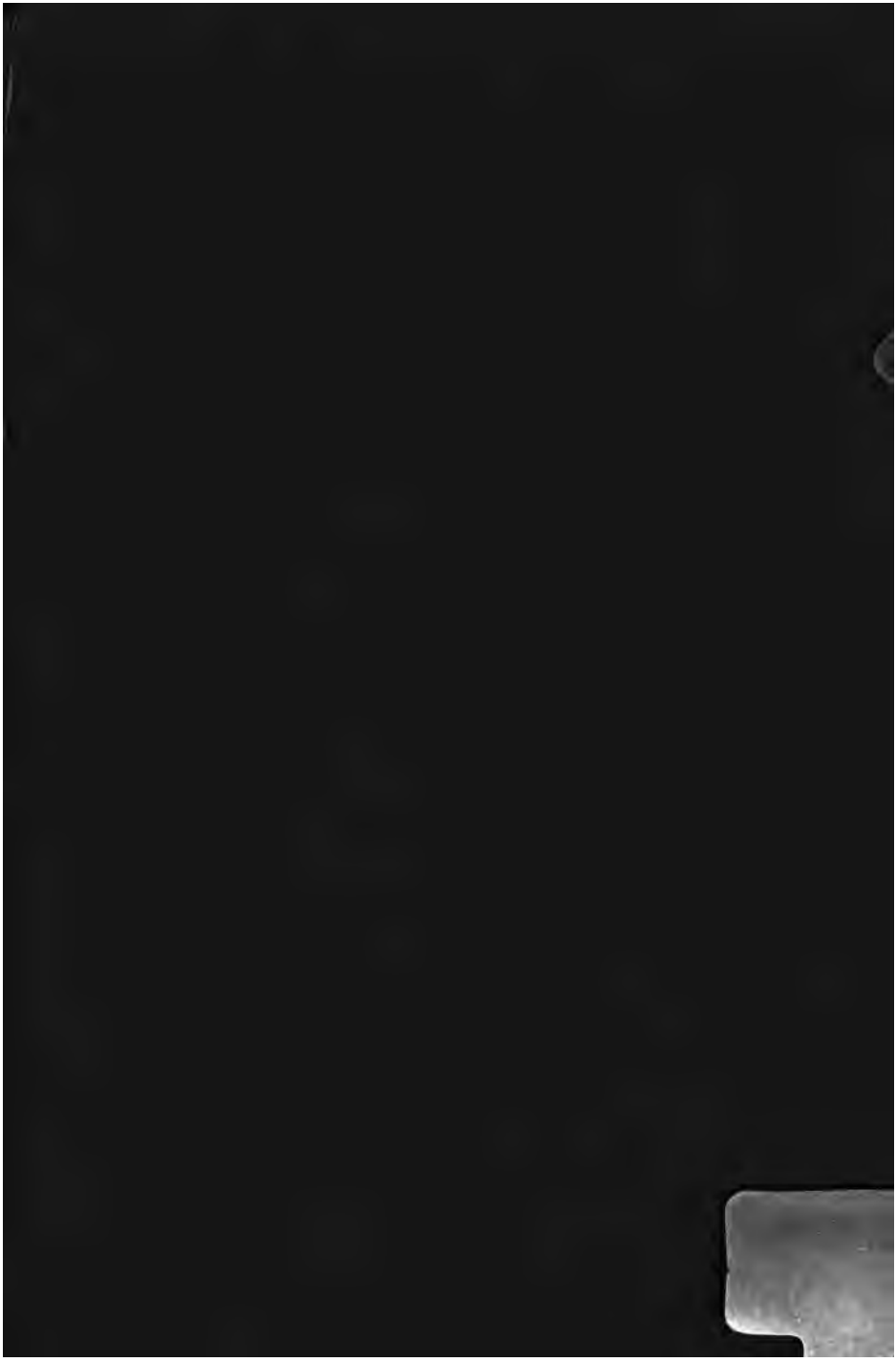
"Frank—if I could make you understand——"

They were walking towards a recess, when Lady Vivian fastened upon Raymond. "Pray find my sister; she forgets that we have to be at Lady Granby's—— Oh! are you there, Lenore? Will you see her down,

Mr. Poynsett? Well, Frank, did you get as far as you intended?"

And she went down on his arm, her last words being, "Take care of yourself till we meet at home. For this one year I call Sirenwood home—then!"

Raymond and Lenore said no more to one another. The ladies were put into the carriage. The elder brother bade Frank take care of Cecil, and started for Westminster with the poor lad's blank and disappointed face still before his eyes, hoping at least it was well for him, but little in love with life, or what it had to offer.

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON: R. CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR,
BREAD STREET HILL, QUEEN VICTORIA STREET.